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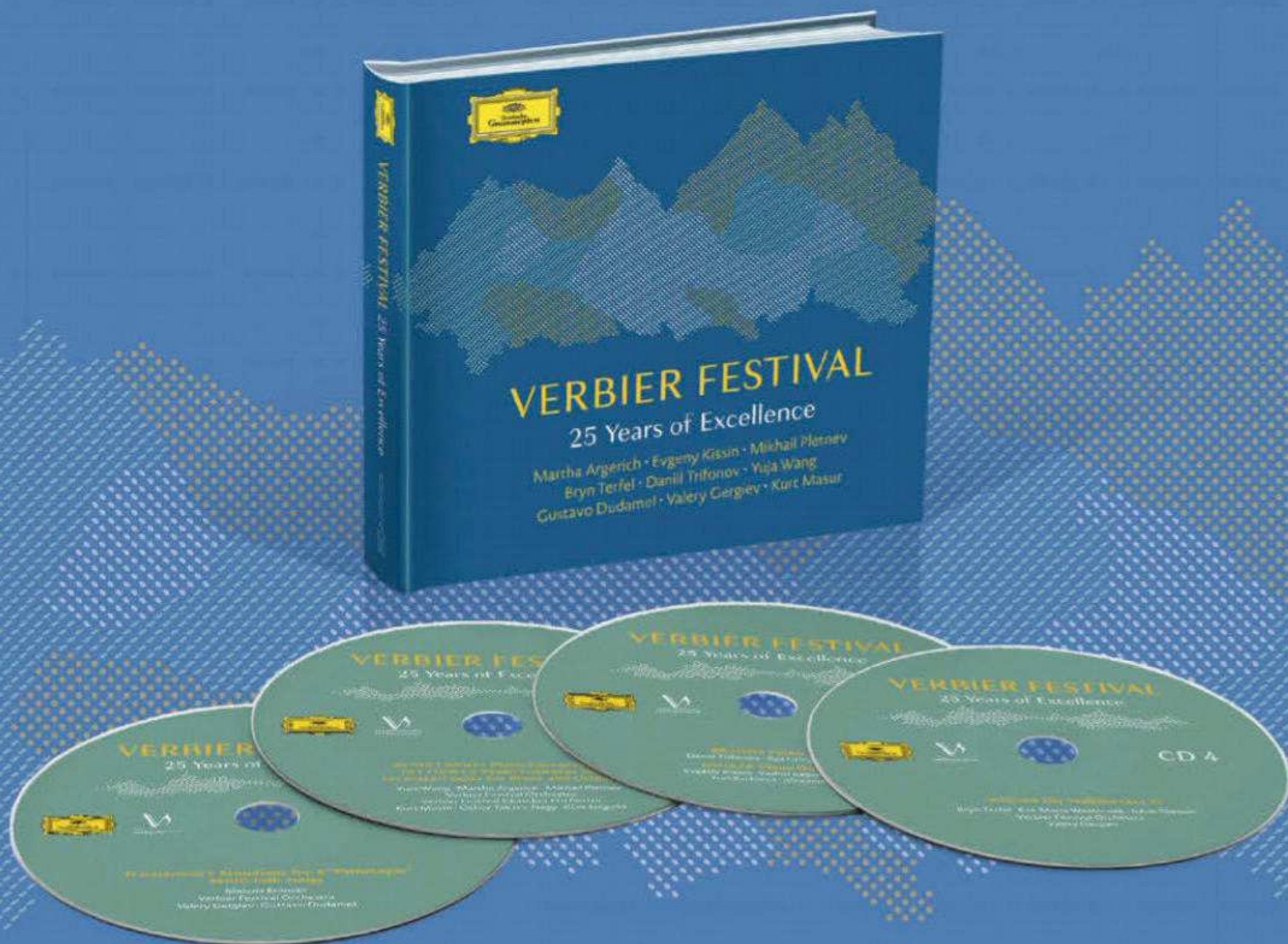
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GRAMOPHONE

ISOUNDS OF AMERICA

A special eight-page section focusing on recent recordings from the US and Canada

Abel

'Time and Distance'

The Benediction^a. In the Rear-View Mirror, Now^b.

The Invocation^c. The Ocean of Forgiveness^d.

Those Who Loved Medusa^e

^{abe}Hila Plitmann ^{sop}^{dc}Janelle DeStefano ^{mez}

^{ce}Carol Rosenberger, ^{abd}Tali Tadmor ^{pf}^b

Mark Abel ^{org}^eBruce Carver ^{perc}

Delos © DE3550 (57' • DDD • T)



Mark Abel's fourth CD on Delos is rich in those moments of inspiration when a composer first comes under the spell of poetry. His marriages of subtly charged music with an eclectic modernist twist to emotionally provocative, introspective texts work best in *Those Who Loved Medusa*, set to Kate Gale's haunting poem, in which Hila Plitmann gloriously evokes Medusa deep in a lover's night: 'Turn me into that thing you fear. Make me monster ... wet, ripe, swollen.' While Delos founding director Carol Rosenberger, returning to the recording studios for the first time in recent years, infuses the involving piano part with characteristic chaste beauty, percussionist Bruce Carver adds whisks and whips of colour to the feminist drama.

Also notable is *In the Rear-View Mirror, Now*, a nod to vintage Hollywood set to the composer's own poems, with Tali Tadmor taking over at the piano and Abel adding ambience and a unique lyrical line at the organ. The second in the cycle, 'The World Clock', is a bittersweet, politically tinged paean to San Francisco before it was taken over by Silicon Valley millionaires. The third, 'The Nature of Friendship', includes tips of the hat to Barbra Streisand's old Broadway hit 'People' and a snatch from Berg's *Lulu*.

Abel heads in another direction with *The Ocean of Forgiveness*, exploring intimate poems of love, desolation and reconciliation by Joanne Regenhardt in quiet, moving ways. The opening and closing tracks are less memorable. Recorded at the Bridge studios in Glendale, California, the sound is always natural and gorgeous. **Laurence Vittes**

GRAMOPHONE talks to ...

Cheryl Seltzer & Joel Sachs

The co-directors of New York's Continuum Ensemble on their latest Roberto Sierra recording



How did you discover the music of Roberto Sierra?

We first got to know Roberto Sierra when he was working in the concert office at the University of Puerto Rico, where Continuum was invited to perform; he was in his early thirties at the time. We asked to see some of his music and were deeply impressed by the maturity of what he showed us. Since then, we have followed him closely, performing a great variety of his music. Almost all of his music for piano four hands and two pianos was composed for us. We feel he is one of the finest composers around.

Was the composer involved with this disc?

We worked indirectly with him since he could not be at the recording sessions. He had heard us perform all of the pieces before we began to record them, giving us very helpful comments, and listened to the recording as it went through various stages of editing. He has been extremely kind.

How would you describe this music, and is it enjoyable to play?

Sierra's music has an extraordinary range, embracing amazing compositional integrity, phenomenal energy and a gorgeous melodiousness. He also never repeats himself. His fusion of Afro-Caribbean elements with the lessons he learned as a former student of Ligeti gives his compositions real depth. While it is virtuosic music that can be very challenging to play, those challenges – always musical, never gratuitous – bring immense rewards for performers and listeners.

What recordings can we look forward to next from Continuum?

Next up will be chamber music by the late German-American Ursula Mamlok, also on Naxos, followed by our fourth Sierra recording, largely of recent works composed for us.

Biver

The Cellar Door. Girl, Walking. Mirror.

No Matter Where. We Meet Ourselves

Fuse Ensemble

Ravello © RR7993 (44' • DDD)



Gina Biver is a musical force of nature: electroacoustic composer, producer, electric guitarist and director of the Washington DC-based Fuse Ensemble she helped found 10 years ago. Although a busy composer of multimedia works – whether for film, kinetic sculptures, dance – the five

works gathered here were written for the Fuse Ensemble to play, with the composer one of the two vocalists in *Mirror* (2012; the other is the late Colette Inez, whose poem 'Empress in the Mirror' was the inspiration for the work). Biver is also the guitarist in *Girl, Walking* (2014), an at times enchanting quartet for flute, electric guitar, bass and 'found percussion'.

Biver's brand of electroacoustic music leans stylistically more to crossover idioms than to the type created by, for example, Pierre Schaeffer, Nono or Stockhausen. As with these exemplars from an earlier generation, Biver's music has a strong element of improvisation, a co-creation with the performers from a pre-set



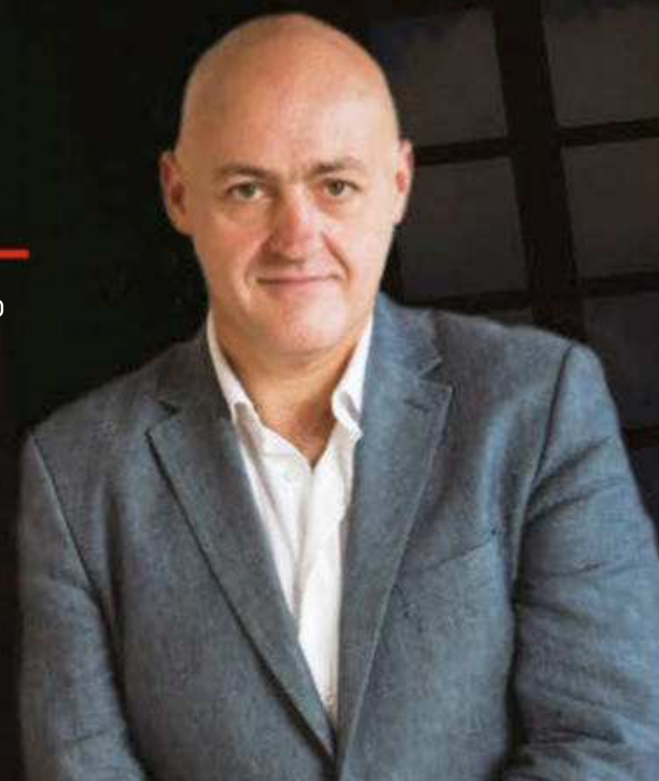
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Brilliant retro entertainment: John Tibbetts and Scott Purcell in Marc Blitzstein's *The Cradle Will Rock*

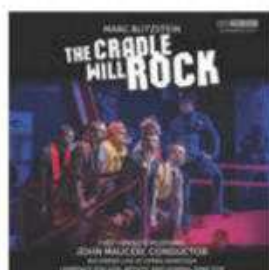
template. *No Matter Where* (2010) and *Girl, Walking* are fine examples of her idiom, though the combination in the latter of electric guitar and flute gives it the atmosphere of a 1970s film track. In the marimba solo *We Meet Ourselves* (2015), percussionist-dedicatée Scott Dean partners himself with a 'triggered audio' of pre-recorded samples. *The Cellar Door* is a duo inspired by Jung where the live cello and piano instrumentalists represent the conscious element, and the audio track (of a waterphone) the unconscious.

On a more negative note, Biver's music relies overmuch on repetition. Ostinato patterns drive the music forwards but too often merely mark time rather than truly develop; similarly, her harmonic language is rather static and unadventurous. There is plenty to enjoy, with such well-prepared performances, but the overall impression is of a short-measure disc of works which outlast their material. **Guy Rickards**

Blitzstein

The Cradle Will Rock

Soloists include **Ginger Costa-Jackson, Keith Jameson and Christopher Burchett; Opera Saratoga Orchestra / John Mauceri**
Bridge ② BRIDGE9511 (111' • DDD • T)
Recorded live, July 2017



The first complete recording of Marc Blitzstein's *The Cradle Will Rock*, restoring the composer's original 1937 orchestrations, raises the inevitable questions about whether this iconic musical drama is an edgy, still relevant outcry of social outrage or merely a brilliant retro entertainment. Made during live performances by Opera Saratoga in 2017, it is more the latter, lacking the activist energy and aura of the famous Broadway production by Orson Welles when, because of skittish government sensibilities, the cast had to sing from the audience while the composer played the score at a piano alone on the stage.

The musical influences that Blitzstein drew on include European operetta, Kurt Weill, Stravinsky and the *Broadway Melody* movies (without Busby Berkeley's choreography). *Cradle* would go on to influence, first and foremost, much of Leonard Bernstein's stage work.

The pace is initially deliberate, then picks up and takes off at the Mission scene. By the appearance of the Triple-Flank Maneuver song, with its exuberant klezmer clarinet

solo, Mauceri and his cast have hit their stride. Ginger Costa-Jackson's magnificent Moll sets the tone for the performance with the Ruth Etting-like melancholy of her opening song, Christopher Burchett contributes a rousing version of Larry the Foreman's call to action and Nina Spinner, one of the many cast members from Opera Saratoga's Young Artist Program, contributes an inspiring version of Ella Hammer's song about workers named Joe.

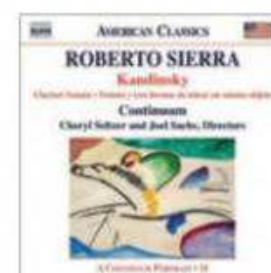
The recording is excellently balanced and opens up with volume to create an exciting sound stage. The booklet includes detailed notes and libretto, the second CD a 14-minute bonus track of Blitzstein describing the work's provenance and first performances. **Laurence Vittes**

R Sierra

Kandinsky^a. Clarinet Sonata^b. Thirty-Three Ways to Look at the Same Object^c

Continuum / Cheryl Seltzer, Joel Sachs

Naxos American Classics ② 8 559849 (65' • DDD)

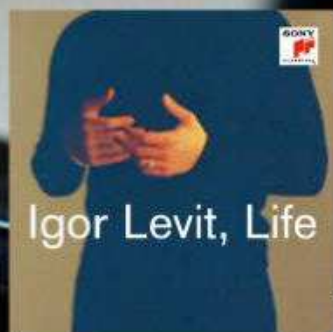


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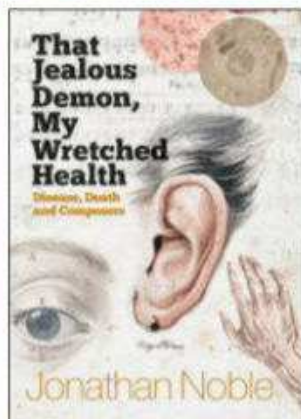


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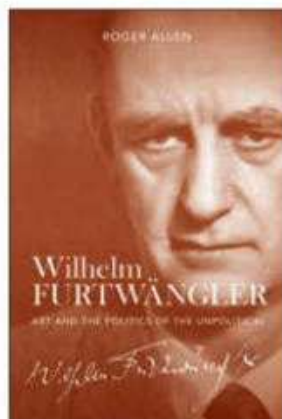


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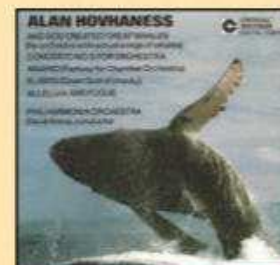
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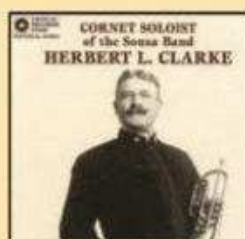


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Michael Koenig plays organ music by Hampson Sisler inspired by holidays and special occasions

have a complex history, dating from various points between July/August 2010 (*Kandinsky*, three movements of the Clarinet Sonata and 14 of *Thirty-Three Ways to Look at the Same Object*) and August 2014, when the final missing movements were added. The first 16 movements of *Thirty-Three Ways* were set down at yet another time (January 2013). Quite why this should have been the case, from a group with a close working relationship with the composer, goes unexplained in the booklet.

Fortunately, the location (KAS Music & Sound, Astoria, New York) was constant throughout, and the discontinuities of the recording process have not impaired the finished result. The piano quartet *Kandinsky* (2003) was the one work set down at one time, its 11 movements providing expressive snapshots of Sierra's intense and very Latin American reactions to specific paintings by the artist (not unlike Sierra's *Turner* of 2002, based on six paintings of the English pre-Impressionist). The four instruments play together only in the finale, 'Colorful Ensemble'.

The Clarinet Sonata (2005-06) – played by Moran Katz and Joel Sachs – is a real find, a very entertaining four-movement work that presents enormous technical challenges, especially for the pianist, who

is often called on to play contrasting themes in different tempos simultaneously. Precisely calculated, it sounds almost improvisatory in its natural verve and swing. Sierra likes to conclude works with a Latin dance movement to trigger applause, and *Thirty-Three Ways* has a whole series of them. This vibrant cycle for piano four hands (2005-08) is essentially a set of quicksilver variations (some slow, most swift) not on a theme but on a hexachord which Sierra metamorphoses with seemingly inexhaustible élan. The performances are splendid, the sound clear and bright. **Guy Rickards**

Sisler

'All Around the Year - Organ

Music for Special Occasions'

Family Days Suite. Popular Monastics Suite

Michael Koenig *org*

MSR © MS1666 (48' • DDD)

Played on the Skinner organ of the Evangelische Saarkirche, Ingelheim am Rhein, Germany



Among the MSR label's releases devoted to music by the American choral

conductor, organist and composer Hampson Sisler (b1932), the present disc is the first to feature solo organ music, specifically premiere recordings of two large multi-movement suites. Like many organ composers, Sisler is not averse to interweaving traditional hymns and folk songs within his original works. He manages to do this without sounding forced, partly due to the fluency and textural discretion of his organ-writing.

The *Family Days Suite*'s opening movement, 'Mother's Day', for example, opens with about 54 seconds' worth of gentle chromatic exploration, followed by a hymn tune accompanied at first by simple drones in fifths. The harmony grows more complex yet never cluttered, as chorale prelude-like passages alternate with contemplative contrapuntal movement. Concerning the second movement, 'Father's Day', Sisler's description of a 'playful and light' style in melody and metre belies the music's introspective chorale prelude character. The final movement, 'A Salute to Grandparents', appeals with its relative rhythmic variety, Impressionist-inspired harmonic ideas and mysteriously trailing-off ending.

Similarly, the subject of holidays inspires Sisler's five-movement *Popular Monastics*

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Suite. I like the searching quality of the first movement's sparsely scored sections but I perceive no correlation between manifestations of winter's end as described by the composer's annotations and what the music actually sounds like. Sisler's skilful combination of three themes over the course of the final movement holds interest until the coda's stretto, where the textures turn muddy and indistinct. Because of the overall sameness of mood from work to work, I wouldn't recommend hearing both suites in one sitting. It's not clear if Michael Koenig's performances were recorded in consultation with or in the presence of the composer but his excellent articulation and assiduous registrations help to make the best case for this repertoire. **Jed Distler**

Steffens

Two Cells in Sevilla, or Don Quixote is Hungry^a
Five Songs on Hölderlin, Op 95^b

^b**Sonja Bruzauskas** *mez* ^b**Tali Morgulis** *pf*

^a**Members of the Greenbriar Consortium / David Kirk**

Navona © NV6174 (51' • DDD)

Libretto and German texts available from navona.com



The German composer Walter Steffens (b1934) has written in many styles

and genres, from the intimate to the extravagant, and embraced everything from art songs, chamber music and orchestral works to opera. Among the extensive list of creations he has based on paintings is *Guernica*, a powerful orchestral depiction of Picasso's masterpiece.

On this new disc, two recent works in the vocal sphere reveal how flexible Steffens can be according to the dictates of the respective texts. A post-Romantic sensibility in *Five Songs on Hölderlin* (2008) is reflected in expressive melodic lines wedded to rich harmonies. The verses aren't printed in the CD booklet but they can be read – only in German – on the Navona Records website. Mezzo-soprano Sonja Bruzauskas and pianist Tali Morgulis shape the songs with elegant commitment.

Steffens switches gears in *Two Cells in Sevilla, or Don Quixote is Hungry* (2016), a one-act chamber opera in which the imprisoned protagonists hope to be fed more acceptable food by weaving exciting tales for the love-starved female cook. The prisoners turn out to be Miguel de Cervantes (creator of *Don Quixote*) and

Tirso de Molina (*Don Juan*), who run into some competition when a servant reads a Falstaff letter penned by a foreigner named Shakespeare.

The libretto, by Marec Béla Steffens (the composer's son), possesses dashes of wit and colour that are embodied in the lively instrumental contributions but not always in the austere vocal writing. The music, full of Expressionist gestures, rarely smiles. Members of the Houston-based Greenbriar Consortium, nevertheless, give their all as led by David Kirk. **Donald Rosenberg**

'Friends in Common Time'

A Albert Fantasia Brevik Pastorale Caplet
Rêverie et Petite valse Kayali Bagatelle Kütt
Flute Sonata Machajdik Senahh Timofeev
Reminiscenza KW Walker Winter in the Woods
Rebecca Jeffreys fl Alexander Timofeev pf
Rebecca Jeffreys © 7 00261 46521-0 (55' • DDD)



Flautist Rebecca Jeffreys and pianist Alexander Timofeev may not always be

'Friends in Common Time' on their new disc, given the various time signatures the eight represented composers employ. But the performances couldn't be more amiable and intimate, and the musicians appear to savour the opportunity to introduce unknown repertoire that should appeal to listeners beyond the flute-piano world.

One of the composers is the Moldovan-born Timofeev himself. His *Reminiscenza* wears nostalgia lightly on its sleeve as the instruments engage in lyrical and jaunty conversation. Like that piece, several others say what they have to say in concise terms. Norwegian composer Tor Brevik's *Pastorale* is a tender ballade and German composer Peter Kütt's *Sonatina* a three-movement score juxtaposing poetic and soaring ideas.

The flute has a chance to take off during the cadenza in Adrienne Albert's *Fantasia*, which also finds the instruments sharing winsome melodic material. Slovakian composer Peter Machajdik weaves haunting chords, figures, and textures in *Senahh*, though the disc's absence of booklet notes precludes any insight into the title.

Subtle sonorities abound in Kevin W Walker's *Winter in the Woods* for alto flute and prepared piano, which places the instruments in serene balance. The disc's only potentially familiar composer is André Caplet (1878-1925), whose *Rêverie et Petite valse* comprises two charming movements that Jeffreys and Timofeev play with fine

sophistication, as is true of everything they touch on this genial and distinctly uncommon recording. **Donald Rosenberg**

'Mélancholie'

Bartók Two Elegies, Op 8b Sz41
Laurié Préludes fragiles, Op 1
Schumann Piano Sonata No 1, Op 11
Zhenni Li pf
Steinway & Sons © STNS30097 (65' • DDD)



Zhenni Li's new Steinway release is a bolt from the blue. Li holds bachelor and master's degrees from Juilliard, where she worked with Seymour Lipkin and Joseph Kalichstein. She continued postgraduate studies with Peter Frankl at Yale and with Stéphane Lemelin at McGill. Her beautiful sound is captured in full dimension and depth in this expertly engineered recording.

Li leaves no detail of Schumann's F sharp minor Sonata unattended. The minute scrutiny brought to every element of the score would, in other hands, fragment and shatter the piece. Yet somehow, by dint of passionate identification and sheer force of will, Li pulls it off. Her extravagant and pervasive rubato, which occasionally risks derailing everything she sets in motion, strikes nonetheless as so heartfelt and intrinsic to her emotional response to the music as to be indisputable. There are moments when you wish for more than just a few consecutive measures of steady pulse, but then Li's torrents of voluptuous sound sweep away any reservation. I am unprepared to venture how this interpretative approach might fare when applied to any other Romantic sonata, but the mercurial landscape of Schumann's Op 11 is able to encompass it, and Li emerges, if not triumphant, at least thoroughly persuasive.

Translating the titles of Bartók's Op 8b as either the Latinate 'elegy' or the Middle English-derived 'dirge' is misleading. The original Hungarian *sírato* is something closer to 'keening at graveside'. In any case, Bartók's precise notation of these folk-inspired works seems the antithesis of the fulsome Scriabinesque melange of Li's conception. Arthur Lourié's 1910 Preludes, on the other hand, strike just the right note of elusive piquancy.

Li impresses as an artist of tremendous conviction, who fascinates even as she provokes. Time will tell. **Patrick Rucker**

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Pictured: Violinist Janine Jansen (DECCA / © Marco Borggreve) who featured on the January 2016 cover of Gramophone. Full annual retail price for print only (13 issues) is \$142.87; print only annual subscription or Digital Edition or Reviews Database (\$101); Digital Club (\$134); Gramophone Club (\$167). If choosing a print option, an addition overseas P+P charge will be added at \$35.75 (Outside EU). If you have a subscription enquiry then please email subscriptions@markallengroup.com

The amazing variety of approaches to Bach

In my time as Editor there have been several occasions when, month after month, one composer has reliably featured in the Editor's Choice selection, sometimes more than once. That composer is JS Bach. It could be personal bias on my part, of course, but I think it's more than that. There are perhaps few composers whose music lends itself so well to so many varieties of interpretation, and few who inspire performers to such profound levels of music-making.

On the first point, it's remarkable that so much of Bach's instrumental music can work equally well on piano, strings, wind, accordion, symphony orchestra, jazz trio ... and remarkable, too, that the music is not only able to bear the transcription, but even offer up unexpected and hidden depths in that new guise. On the second, I am rarely as moved by music as I am by moments of Bach, be it the great Chaconne from the Second Partita for solo violin or the profound spirituality and humanity in the unfolding of the Passion story in one or other of Bach's settings.

Words like 'Everest' are regularly used about Bach's masterpieces, a reflection of the status they hold in the development of an artist's life and career. Could a career as extraordinary as Glenn Gould's have been more fittingly bookended than by the *Goldberg Variations*, offering two completely different but equally moving interpretations which respectively reflect the bravado and optimism of youth, and the reflectiveness and wisdom of maturity? The compulsion and desire by artists to perform Bach's music, and the resulting diversity: is it any



wonder that his music has formed such a constant thread through the history of recording? For if the music of few composers has generated such an array of recordings, in the music of fewer still can we see reflected and chronicled the changes in both performance practice and recording techniques across the remarkable century or so of the studio.

Bach's music is therefore the perfect subject for the sort of treatment DG has lavished on it in its latest bumper box-set, 'Bach 333' (the number of years since his birth, in case you were wondering!). At 222 CDs, it's apparently the biggest composer box-set ever, and will certainly take some beating; though with Beethoven's 250th anniversary lying just around the corner in 2020, there's certainly a gauntlet there to be picked up ...

Gould's *Goldbergs* didn't make the box-set, but few classical music recordings better fulfil the definition of an album. Complete, perfectly shaped (though to be fair, Bach had done that bit), their release, and subsequent playing, felt and feels like an event. That's what a recording at its best should do – something everyone here felt when our newly crowned Recording of the Year, Berlioz's *Les Troyens*, arrived. On October 13, the UK record industry is celebrating the inaugural National Album Day by inviting listeners, artists, radio stations and the public to play their favourite album at, appropriately enough, 3.33pm. It's a genre-wide initiative, but it would be lovely to think that among the pop and rock filling the air and the airwaves, there might also be some Berlioz – or, indeed, some Bach.

martin.cullingford@markallengroup.com

THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS



'What a pleasure to explore the rich variety of recorded performances of this inexhaustible body of

staggeringly great music,' says **SIR NICHOLAS KENYON**, author of our Bach cover story and consultant on DG's box-set, 'all of which show the profound impact of his music over the generations.'



'If, five years ago, you'd told me or any other Rued Langgaard nerd that we'd be listening to new recordings of

his symphonies from the Vienna Philharmonic, I'd have said you were mad,' says **ANDREW MELLOR**, author of our feature on the composer. 'It was a real privilege to drop in on one of the live recordings.'



'I believe that Ingrid Fliter is one of the greatest interpreters of Chopin today,' says **JEREMY NICHOLAS**, who

interviewed the Argentinian pianist in Milan for our profile feature this issue. 'To have the chance, therefore, to meet her in person and talk about her new Nocturnes disc was an absolute joy.'

THE REVIEWERS Andrew Achenbach • David Allen • Nalen Anthony • Tim Ashley • Mike Ashman • Michelle Assay • Richard Bratby • Edward Breen • Liam Cagney • Alexandra Coghlan • Rob Cowan (consultant reviewer) • Jeremy Dibble • Peter Dickinson • Jed Distler • Adrian Edwards • Richard Fairman • David Fallows • David Fanning • Andrew Farach-Colton • Iain Fenlon • Neil Fisher • Fabrice Fitch • Jonathan Freeman-Attwood • Charlotte Gardner • David Gutman • Christian Hoskins • Lindsay Kemp • Philip Kennicott • Richard Lawrence • Andrew Mellor • Ivan Moody • Bryce Morrison • Hannah Nepil • Jeremy Nicholas • Christopher Nickol • Geoffrey Norris • Richard Osborne • Stephen Plaistow • Mark Pullinger • Peter Quantrill • Guy Rickards • Malcolm Riley • Marc Rochester • Patrick Rucker • Julie Anne Sadie • Edward Seckerson • Hugo Shirley • Pwyll ap Siôn • Harriet Smith • David Patrick Stearns • David Threasher • David Vickers • John Warrack • Richard Whitehouse • Arnold Whittall • Richard Wigmore • William Yeoman

Gramophone, which has been serving the classical music world since 1923, is first and foremost a monthly review magazine, delivered today in both print and digital formats. It boasts an eminent and knowledgeable panel of experts, which reviews the full range of classical music recordings. Its reviews are completely independent. In addition to reviews, its interviews and features help readers to explore in greater depth the recordings that the magazine covers, as well as offer insight into the work of composers and performers. It is *the* magazine for the classical record collector, as well as for the enthusiast starting a voyage of discovery.

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NEW RELEASES ON WARNER CLASSICS AND ERATO



ALEXANDRE THARAUD BEETHOVEN

Alexandre Tharaud records Beethoven's last three sonatas, Nos. 30, 31 & 32, composed 1820–22 and considered amongst some of the most difficult works in the repertoire.



JEAN RONDEAU SCARLATTI

Jean Rondeau turns to Domenico Scarlatti and some 20 of the often-dazzling sonatas that the Neapolitan composer wrote during his years at the royal court in Madrid.



JAKUB JÓZEF ORLIŃSKI ANIMA SACRA

The debut album from the rising-star countertenor featuring what are believed to be world premiere recordings of eight Baroque arias, notably by composers of the Neapolitan school.



IAN BOSTRIDGE ANTONIO PAPPANO

Marking the 100th anniversary of the end of World War I, Ian Bostridge and Antonio Pappano present a programme of songs offering historical and poetic perspectives on this momentous event.



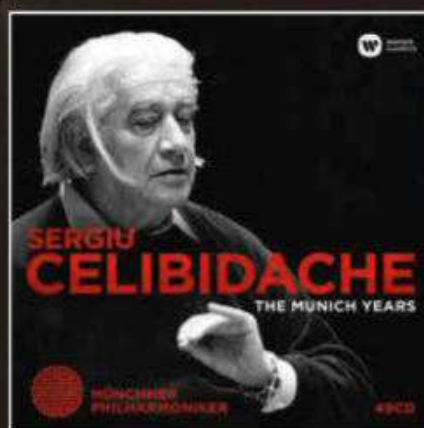
THE LEEDS THE OFFICIAL ALBUM

Warner Classics and the Leeds International Piano Competition in a major new partnership to bring the best of the outstanding pianistic talent of 'The Leeds' to audiences around the world.



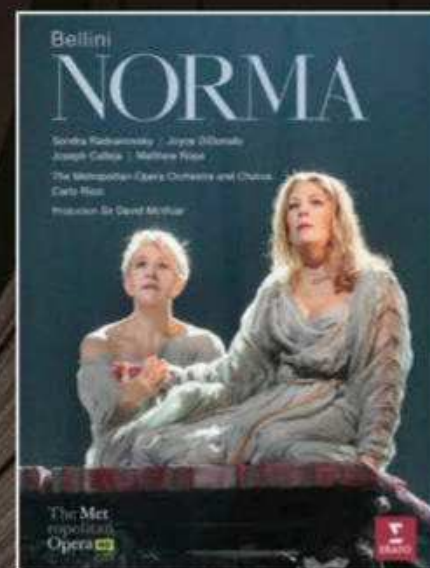
HELEN MERCIER CYPRIEN KATSARIS

Brahms piano works for four hands capturing the improvisatory character of the Gypsy spirit in the Hungarian Dances coupled with the Viennese elegance in the Waltzes.



SERGIU CELIBIDACHE THE MUNICH YEARS

This 49-CD box celebrates the extraordinary legacy of his collaboration with the Müncher Philharmoniker portraying the excitement and atmosphere of their live performances.



JOYCE DIDONATO BELLINI: NORMA

Sir David McVicar's 2017 Metropolitan Opera production of Vincenzo Bellini's Norma, starring Sondra Radvanovsky, Joseph Calleja, and Joyce DiDonato.



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GRAMOPHONE *Editor's choice*

Martin Cullingford's pick of the finest recordings from this month's reviews



RECORDING OF THE MONTH



CHOPIN Cello Sonata, etc
SCHUBERT Arpeggione Sonata
Steven Isserlis *vc*
Dénes Várjon *pf*
Hyperion
► **HARRIET SMITH'S REVIEW IS ON PAGE 32**

From the infectious joy that opens the disc, to the more reflective and intense works and movements, this is music-making that just feels wonderfully instinctive and personal.



BARTÓK Violin Concerto No 1 **ENESCU** Octet
Vilde Frang *vn* **Radio France Philharmonic Orchestra / Mikko Franck**
Warner Classics

Vilde Frang adds to her already impressive discography; along with her superb colleagues she offers a memorable Enescu Octet, and a fine Bartók coupling.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 34**



HAYDN Cello Concertos
SCHOENBERG Verklärte Nacht
Alisa Weilerstein *vc*
Trondheim Soloists
Pentatone

The inspired Alisa Weilerstein pulls off an unusual and illuminating pairing – but then as someone who has paired Elgar and Carter concertos, what do you expect?

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 40**



VAUGHAN WILLIAMS A Sea Symphony
Sols; BBC Symphony Chorus and Orchestra / Martyn Brabbins
Hyperion

Critic Andrew Achenbach couldn't praise more highly the intelligence and control with which Martyn Brabbins approaches this work, caught in excellent sound.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 47**



PADEREWSKI Piano Works
Kevin Kenner *pf*
Fryderyk Chopin Institute
'A piano disc ... to treasure' writes Jeremy

Nicholas of this recital, one successfully steeped in Kevin Kenner's long acquaintance with the music, and recorded on the composer's own instrument.

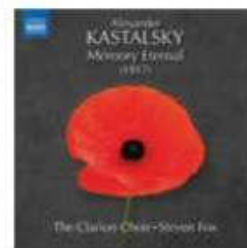
► **REVIEW ON PAGE 71**



JANSON The Wind Blows - Choral Works
Norwegian Soloists' Choir / Grete Pedersen
BIS

A fascinating presentation of the music of the contemporary Norwegian composer Alfred Janson, given compelling advocacy by the Norwegian Soloists' Choir.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 80**



KASTALSKY Memory Eternal
The Clarion Choir / Steven Fox
Naxos

'The rehabilitation of a major work' writes Ivan Moody; this is music powerfully rooted in the Russian sound world, sung with passion, and beautifully recorded.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 81**



MONTEVERDI Vespro della Beata Vergine
Collegium Vocale Gent / Philippe Herreweghe
PHI

A superb performance of Monteverdi's *Vespers* – three decades after Herreweghe's first – which feels fresh and bursting with delightfully collaborative musicianship.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 83**



STRAVINSKY Perséphone
Sols; Finnish National Opera Orchestra / Esa-Pekka Salonen
Pentatone

Esa-Pekka Salonen's grasp of Stravinsky's score and control of the musical forces lends this recording a gripping sense of drama and drive.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 83**



'MELANCHOLIA' Les Cris de Paris / **Geoffroy Jourdain**
Harmonia Mundi
Les Cris de Paris offer a very exciting choral

sound – individual voices balanced with moments of dramatic blend – as they delve into the darkness and introspection of a 16-/17th-century programme.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 86**



DVD/BLU-RAY
LEHÁR Das Land des Lächelns
Sols; Philharmonia Zurich / Fabio Luisi
Accentus

The focus is very much on the music here in Fabio Luisi's presentation of this Lehár operetta, one highly praised by reviewer Richard Bratby, who hopes this 'genuinely moving masterpiece' will find new friends.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 92**



REISSUE/ARCHIVE
RACHMANINOV Symphonic Dances, etc
Sergey Rachmaninov *pf*
Marston

A major historical release – Rachmaninov captured demonstrating his own *Symphonic Dances*.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 108**

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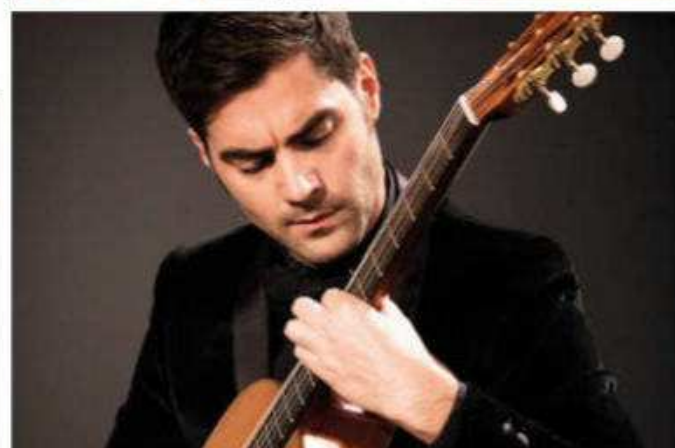
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FOR THE RECORD



GRAMOPHONE CLASSICAL MUSIC AWARDS 2018

Memorable moments from our ceremony on September 13



Top of page (clockwise): the Awards at the De Vere Grand Connaught Rooms; Neeme Järvi (Lifetime Achievement); Miloš Karadaglić performs Villa-Lobos; Kristijan Järvi conducts the Estonian National Symphony Orchestra; Lise Davidsen (Young Artist of the Year) with Marek Zwiebel of the Pavel Haas Quartet (Chamber); and Rachel Podger (Artist of the Year). **Above** (from left): Marianne Crebassa (Solo Vocal); Kaspars Putniņš (Choral); Christian Girardin of Harmonia Mundi (Label of the Year); Scott Metcalfe (Early Music); Delphine Galou (Recital); Joyce DiDonato on the big screen (Opera & Recording of the Year). **Right**: Arditti Quartet (Contemporary)



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The Arvo Pärt Centre opens in Estonia

A building devoted to the music and life of Arvo Pärt opens this month in the composer's home country of Estonia.

The Arvo Pärt Centre – which will serve as both archive and performance space – is set in Laulasmaa, immersed in a pine forest on a peninsula 35km from Tallinn. It was felt important that it would be a place to which people would have to make a deliberate and meaningful journey, rather than chance upon.

Few living composers have the reach or resonance of Pärt, whose deeply spiritual music has given rise to many acclaimed recordings, not least on the ECM label, with which he has had a relationship dating back to 1984. The centre, which is built around several courtyards and



Archive, concert hall and exhibition space: the new Arvo Pärt Centre in Estonia

with no right angles, was designed by Spanish architects Fuensanta Nieto and Enrique Sobejano, inspired by the 'silence, beauty and geometry' of Pärt's music – in particular *Tabula rasa*, one of his most significant works. As well as housing his manuscripts, diaries, writings and other items related to his life and work – material to which Pärt is adding through personal commentary and reflection – there is also a 140-seat chamber hall and exhibition space.

ONE TO WATCH

Calidore Quartet

The Calidore Quartet hails from Los Angeles (their name is an amalgamation of 'California' and 'doré', French for 'golden') and is now based in New York. The four members studied at the Colborn Conservatory of Music in Los Angeles, and they formed the Calidore Quartet while students there in 2010. In 2016 the quartet won the inaugural M-Prize Competition, an international chamber arts competition based at the University of Michigan that came with a \$100,000 award, and became the first North American ensemble to be awarded a fellowship from the Borletti-Buitoni Trust. In the same year, the quartet became BBC New Generation Artists, which gave them extensive exposure on BBC Radio.

Such a rapid rise led to a new relationship with Signum Records, and the quartet's first



disc for the label – 'Resilience', a thought-provoking programme bonded by musical responses to human suffering – is issued this month (see our review on page 59). The deep sense of communicative rapport these young musicians exude bodes well for future projects; discussions for a second disc with Signum are underway and we look forward to hearing whatever comes next.

GRAMOPHONE *Online*

The magazine is just the beginning. Visit gramophone.co.uk for ...

The Awards in HD and on YouTube

The 2018 *Gramophone* Awards ceremony was broadcast live by **medici.tv**. You can now enjoy the broadcast in HD when you visit the Awards section of the *Gramophone* website.

The ceremony includes some wonderful live performances by the likes of Marianne Crebassa, Miloš Karadaglić, Lise Davidsen, Rachel Podger, James Baillieu, Kristjan and Neeme Järvi, and the Estonian National Symphony Orchestra. There are also many moving and entertaining speeches from this year's winners to enjoy.



Jess Gillam joins James Jolly as a guest presenter

We've also released some of the live performances as individual videos on *Gramophone's* YouTube page. Make sure you subscribe to our YouTube channel for exclusive new classical music performances and interviews.

Music for TV drama

Some of the finest television drama scores of the last two decades are essential listening, with or without the onscreen action. In a special online feature, James McCarthy presents a listener's guide to recent music written for TV drama, from the chamber-music intensity of Nico Muhly's *Howards End* and Michael Giacchino's *Lost*, to the epic orchestral canvas of Ramin Djawadi's *Game of Thrones* and the reinvention of 1980s synth-pop by Michael Stein and Kyle Dixon for *Stranger Things*.

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ARTISTS & *their* INSTRUMENTS

Julian Bliss on his customised Leblanc Legacy B flat clarinet

“I first started working with Leblanc around 12 years ago. I was at a music trade show and they had a prototype of a new professional clarinet which I tried and instantly loved. We started talking and it became clear that we both had the same thoughts on student instruments. For an advancing player, you want to have the best quality and consistency possible even if the cost is in the lower price bracket. Through ongoing discussions, we decided to create a new intermediate instrument that would be easy to play, that would play in tune, and that was consistent from one instrument to the next.

I had no knowledge of the manufacturing process, so my involvement back then was as an artist. They'd send something to me for feedback, or sometimes I'd go over there to Indiana, and I'd say I'd like the sound to be 'darker' or 'brighter' or 'warmer' - I'd use musical terms, which weren't always easy to translate into engineering terms. Over the years, though, I've become more involved in the engineering side, and today I'm completely immersed!

The Leblanc Bliss was released in 2009: word got out very quickly, and it was soon reaching teachers and players in the US and beyond. So then I had the idea of taking another clarinet, the Leblanc Legacy, and customising it just for me. The work we'd done on the Bliss clarinet had helped me understand what I wanted, and I was able to implement those changes with the Legacy.

A lot of the changes were internal, relating to the bore design and the tone holes - even the slightest adjustment in these two areas



can affect the sound and response. The main thing was that I wanted to be able to play high notes very quietly, and for them to speak how I wanted them to speak every single time. Once we had adapted the design, we turned to the keywork. Everyone's hands are a different size and shape, so this was an opportunity for me to put each key exactly where I wanted it. We took some inspiration from the German system clarinets and added a few extra keys to make trilling between certain notes easier.

And then there was how it looked. I decided I wanted an alternative to the traditional silver

plating, so we chose 24-carat gold plating which does stand out a bit! But I do believe it makes a difference to the sound too - it's warmer and darker, which is instinctively the sound I'm always aiming for anyway.

My customised Leblanc Legacy really is the whole package. I'd never had a clarinet in my hands like it before. It allowed me not to worry about the instrument I was playing, which gave me a tremendous freedom when I performed. I remember that they sent it over to me and I played it that same night in a concert - I couldn't resist! It felt so comfortable and familiar.

I'm playing it in the Weber Quintet, which appears alongside the Mozart Quintet on my new Signum recording. The Weber is all about dexterity, so it's wonderful to have an instrument that reacts this well. All the keys have the same amount of spring-back and they're all located where I want them to be. The instrument also has an exceptionally even scale with each note having the same response, which helps to create a fluidity of sound.

Fundamentally, a clarinet is a clarinet, and I'd like to think I could pick up any brand and play it and that an audience wouldn't notice. But it's that last 10 per cent of what we do as musicians that you can achieve with an instrument like this. The funny thing is, I've got so used to that I don't actually think about how good it is!

Julian Bliss's recording of the Weber and Mozart String Quintets with the Carducci Quartet is released on Signum on October 26, and will be reviewed in the next issue

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GRAMOPHONE GUIDE TO ... *Fantasia*

Richard Bratby explores the form's varied expressions of compositional freedom

In the absence of words to guide their imagination, what can any instrumental musician do but follow their fancy – or if you prefer, their fantasy? By the mid-16th century the term *Fantasia* covered almost any musical work conceived solely for an instrument, without words or voices. That was how it emerged in Italy and the Low Countries, though it was in England, in the era that began with Byrd and Gibbons and ended with Purcell, that the idea of a *Fantasia* (or *Phantasy*, *Fantazia* or *Fancy*) acquired substance in its own right.

Which was? 'A musician taketh a point at his pleasure and wresteth and turneth it as he list', wrote Thomas Morley in 1597. That's the key to any *fantasia*: an invitation to the performer-composer to follow no rule but their own imagination. Of course, as soon as a flight of fancy – whether for lute, keyboard or consort of viols – is written down, it becomes something altogether more complex, as well as more permanent. No one could confuse Purcell's *Fantasia upon one note* (1680) with an improvisation.

But the spirit is there: 'fantasia' gives a composer's imagination a licence to run free. Bach's *Chromatic Fantasia* (c1720), Mozart's *Fantasia K397* (1782), and the piano solo that opens Beethoven's *Choral Fantasia* (1808) all give a compelling idea of how these supreme composer-performers might have improvised. It's a generous license – the term has been used (especially in the 19th century) for sets of flamboyantly entertaining variations such as Sarasate's *Carmen Fantasy* (1882), as a pretext for programme



Beethoven's *Fantasia*, Op 77, gives a vivid impression of his improvisatory powers

music (eg Tchaikovsky's *Francesca da Rimini*, 1876) and for colourful medleys like Grace Williams's *Fantasia on Welsh Nursery Tunes* (1940).

But the description 'fantasia' also lets composers travel in more challenging directions. How else to describe something as startlingly original as Beethoven's *Sonata quasi una fantasia*, Op 14 No 2 (1801 – the *Moonlight Sonata*) or Vaughan Williams's *Fantasia on a Theme of Thomas Tallis* (1910)? The results can be highly structured, like Britten's Op 2 *Phantasy Quartet* (1932 – written for the Cobbett competition, which explicitly aimed to revive the Purcell-era 'Fancy') or Maxwell Davies's two *Taverner Fantasias* (1962 and 1964), and it's no coincidence that Sibelius originally planned to call his single-movement Seventh Symphony (1924) *Fantasia sinfonica*. But in each case, the effect is the same: the title *Fantasia* suspends formal conventions, and frees the musical imagination to refresh itself with the spirit of improvisation. **G**

► Listen to our *Fantasia* playlist on Qobuz

IN THE STUDIO

● The all-female *a cappella* group **Papagena**, who enjoyed success at this year's Edinburgh Fringe Festival, were in the studio recently to record their Christmas CD – Adrian Peacock was producing. The editing is now complete and the release, on Somm, is scheduled for November.

● Following its premiere in July at the Cheltenham Music Festival, *Liverpool Lullabies* – a double concerto for trombone and percussion, composed by **Christian Lindberg** for **Evelyn Glennie** – was recorded in Antwerp last month. The work is the first-ever double concerto for this instrumental pairing. The recording took place at the Queen Elisabeth Hall, with Lindberg conducting Glennie and the Antwerp Symphony Orchestra from the trombone. The recording, on BIS, is likely to be released next year.

● Also on BIS but back in August, British soprano **Carolyn Sampson** was joined by regular accompanist **Joseph Middleton** at Potton Hall to record a recital programme of English songs by composers including Bridge, Walton and Vaughan Williams. The release looks set for 2019.

● A recording of music used for the **Royal Shakespeare Company's** production of *Troilus and Cressida*, directed by Gregory Doran, has

just been recorded at Vada Studio for the RSC's own label. Repertoire included original music by Evelyn Glennie and Dave Price, plus music by Humphrey Searle from the John Barton/RSC 1960 production. RSC musicians, including Joglaresa's Belinda Sykes (voice), were involved in the two-day session. A release date is yet to be announced.

● Three Chandos artists have made recordings recently. In August violinist **Jennifer Pike**, accompanied by Petr Limonov, explored her Polish heritage with the music of Szymanowski and Wieniawski; the recording will be released in January. Meanwhile, in September, **Jean-Efflam Bavouzet** recorded his fourth volume of Mozart piano concertos with Manchester Camerata, and **Sir Andrew Davis** and the **Toronto Symphony Orchestra** recorded an all-Berlioz programme – both are due for release in mid-2019.

● The world-premiere recording of **Tan Dun's** *Fire Ritual – A Music Ritual for Victims of War* has just been recorded, alongside Dun's violin concerto *Rhapsody and Fantasia*, collectively marking an eight-year collaboration between the composer and Norwegian violinist **Eldbjørg Hemsing**. Tan Dun himself was conducting Hemsing and the Oslo Philharmonic for the recording, due out on BIS in March 2019.

ORCHESTRA *Insight ...*

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Music Director Osmo Vänskä

Founding Music Director Emil Oberhoffer

The Minnesota Orchestra has history. But only in the last few decades has it forged and nurtured a true and distinctive identity, thanks to events on stage and off it.

As the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra, the ensemble made a series of thunderous recordings under Eugene Ormandy from the cavernous Northrop Memorial Auditorium. It was Ormandy, taking over from the studious Belgian Henri Verbrugghen, who nurtured the qualities needed to make competitive mid-century recordings: a tight, impactful sound with powerful brass at its core. But just as much of that 'sound' came courtesy of Mercury Living Presence, and when the label was cut adrift in the 1960s, so was much of the orchestra's 'presence' outside Minnesota. Subsequent chiefs Mitropoulos (who made the inaugural recording of Mahler's First Symphony) and Dorati continued to record, just not for iconic Mercury.

The Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra became the Minnesota Orchestra in 1968. Six years later it moved to the purpose-built Orchestra Hall, noted for its acoustic clarity and a key incubator of the modern Minnesota sound. Stanisław Skrowaczewski began to sculpt where his predecessors had often punched. After Neville Marriner, Edo de Waart arrived, on a mission to establish character, lamenting the fact that the orchestra wasn't associated with any particular repertoire. He claimed Mahler and Strauss suited it best on record and that it wasn't ready for Beethoven.

But it was Beethoven's music, in this century, that brought the orchestra back to the record shelves and to international attention. Osmo Vänskä arrived as Music Director in 2003,



an astute choice given the orchestra's penchant for clarity of articulation (Vänskä's central obsession) and the genetics of the state of Minneapolis, where more than a fifth of the population has Nordic blood. The complete Beethoven symphonies, prioritising clarity and recorded on Vänskä's label BIS, got the ball rolling. The piano concertos, with Yevgeny Sudbin, were noted by Richard Osborne for orchestral 'strength and sensitivity beyond compare'.

Naturally, Sibelius came next. Midway through the symphony cycle (greeted as a new benchmark by Guy Rickards), a labour dispute locked the orchestra's players out for more than a year from 2012. An entire season was cancelled and Vänskä resigned. It looked very bad indeed. But the orchestra's re-establishment, and Vänskä's return, proved that the uses of adversity are sweet indeed. With the slate cleaned and Orchestra Hall spruced up, the orchestra is arguably playing even better than it did a decade ago. Living proof that what doesn't kill you makes you stronger. **Andrew Mellor**

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Winners to watch

The **Leeds International Piano Competition** has been won by 20-year-old American Eric Lu (above). As well as the prestigious title and £25,000, he also receives what the organisers call a 'portfolio prize designed with long-term career development in mind', including an album on Warner Classics and management with Askonas Holt,

plus engagements with major venues and ensembles. You can watch the competition at leedspiano2018.medicivt. Meanwhile, the **Honens International Piano Competition** in Canada has given its first prize to 26-year-old Georgian pianist Nicolas Namoradze. He, too, receives a development programme including concerts, management and recordings, plus a cash prize of CAD\$100K. Visit honens.com/livestream to watch the performances. The final name to remember comes courtesy of the **Shanghai Isaac Stern International Violin Competition** - 25-year-old American violinist Nancy Zhou, who receives US\$100K as well as performances with several orchestras. Search for the competition in **YouTube** and you'll find videos of the competition, including Zhou's winning final round.

The ROH opens up

Following a £50.7m, three-year refurbishment project, London's Royal Opera House is following in the footsteps of many major cultural venues by opening during the day, offering a daytime-events programme, plus new cafe and restaurant areas. Also reopening, in December, is the rebuilt Linbury Theatre, the venue's 400-seat studio auditorium.

This month on Medici

Relive the *Gramophone* Classical Music Awards 2018, enjoy our Lifetime Achievement Award winner Neeme Järvi conducting Dvořák and Richard Strauss and sample a Philippe Jaroussky masterclass. Visit medici.tv and type 'Gramophone selects' into the search box.

FROM WHERE I SIT

How many modern composers write as well for the human voice as Barber did, asks Edward Seckerson



When you have been in the business for as long as I have it is especially gratifying to reacquire oneself with an operatic work one has long admired but never seen staged. Samuel Barber's *Vanessa* is such an intriguing piece (posing more questions than it ever manages to answer) that recordings or concert performances which leave the physical staging 'in the shadows', as it were, can be strangely satisfying. But it is a stage work and to see it staged at Glyndebourne this year by a director as perceptive and searchingly theatrical as Keith Warner served to clarify some of the questions whilst still leaving the intrigue firmly in place.

It was spooky, too, seeing it in the same week as the Proms *West Side Story* minus its spoken dialogue – another experience throwing the score into the starkest possible relief. And because both scores begin with the dreaded 'tritone', or augmented fourth, whose unsettling effect immediately shouts 'thriller' at you (funny how the expectation of a perfect fifth a semitone short can strike uncertainty or even panic into our expectations), it was fun to see Warner pick up on the Hitchcockian elements of the piece and opt for an environment of mirrors and reflections and all that they imply psychologically. Better yet was his success in tacitly developing the idea that the three women in the piece could actually be three generations of the same woman. Cue that tritone again.

But what hearing *Vanessa* again really brought home to me was the gratefulness of Barber's vocal writing and the way it relates to its orchestral surroundings. Hearing a singer like Leontyne Price (lauded recently in my column on a new Met documentary) embrace what Barber called 'the raptus' – the moment in which the vocal line separates from its orchestral context – is to appreciate his understanding of how the human voice works and exactly what it is capable of. He was a singer himself and as a composer his natural inclination towards song made for an intuitive sense of how melody and line work in relation to an accompaniment, be it a solo piano or a late-Romantic orchestra. *Vanessa* may not work for some people as music drama – they may well consider it a lot of hot air (I know eminently musical people who do) – but they must surely acknowledge the intense expressivity of what might best be described as the 'natural correspondence' between its music and its words (by Menotti).

Writing gratefully for the voice is not given to many. When Barber made a point of saying that to treat the voice as simply another instrument, to treat it like or render it indistinguishable from a clarinet or an oboe, a violin or a cello, is to deny its uniquely 'human' qualities. All too frequently 'contemporary opera' adopts what might be described as a generic template of vocal pyrotechnics, one which pays scant attention to the specifics of the words or indeed the individuality of vocal fachs. At worst it's like a series of nervous tics, one character, one voice type, sounding much the same as the next. And how many times have we heard the voice used for dramatic 'effect' as opposed to expressive purpose? The perpetrators shall remain nameless – but they could all learn from Barber's example. 6

OPUS ARTE

NEW RELEASES

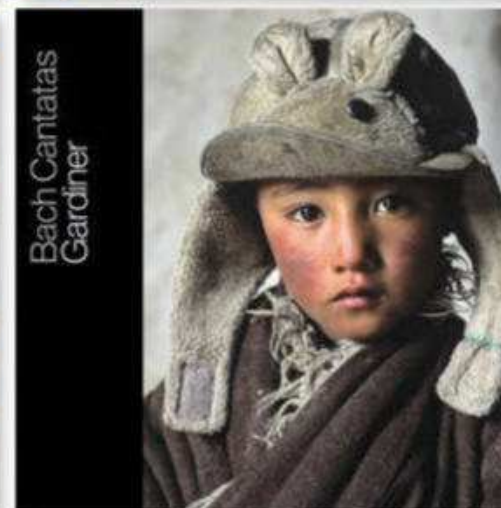
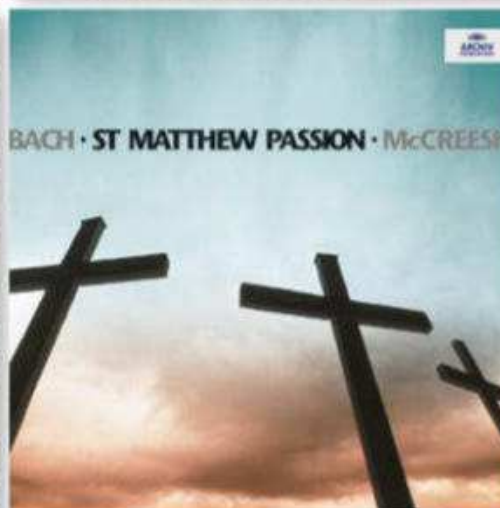
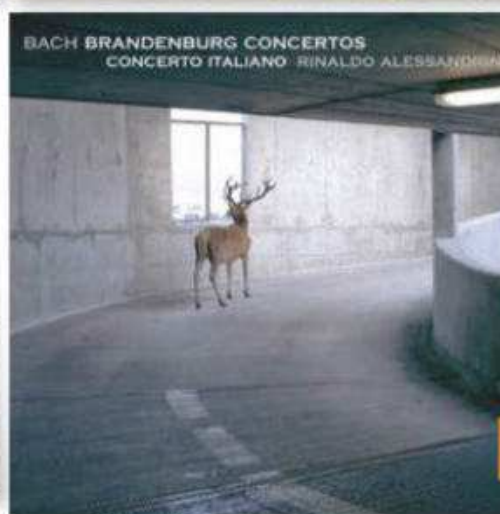
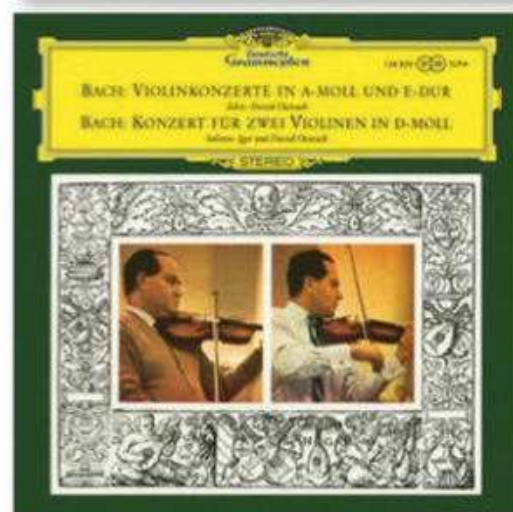
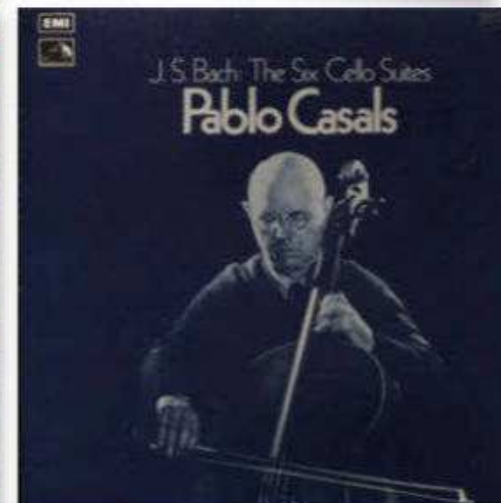
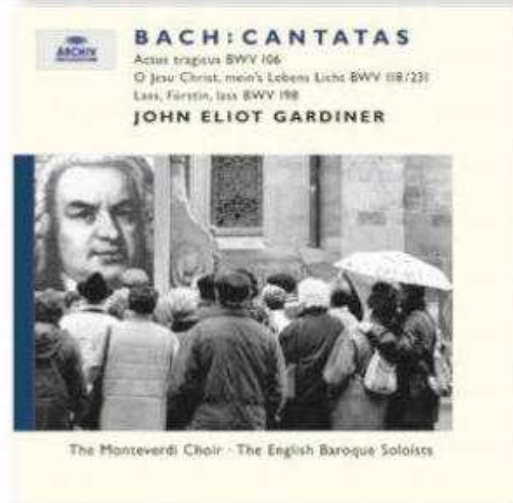
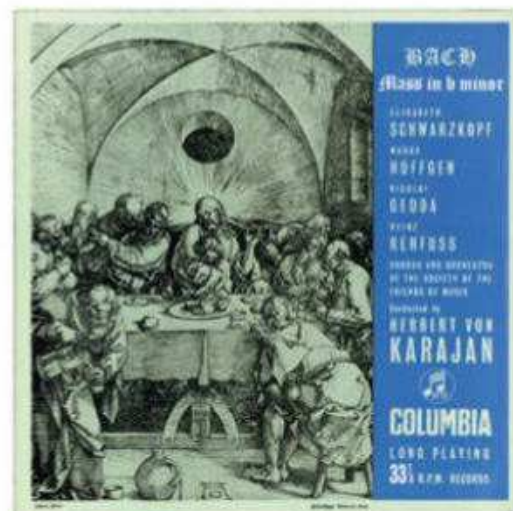
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BACH

An ever-shifting recorded landscape

Ahead of the release of 'Bach 333: The New Complete Edition', **Nicholas Kenyon** assesses the startling evolution of Bach performance on record, from 1892 to the present day

What did Bach sound like? The answer, of course, is that we can never know. It has been 333 years since the birth of Johann Sebastian, and we realise that we cannot recapture the sound of most performances of his music: they are irretrievably lost to us. There are some lively anecdotal accounts of Bach himself performing, as a commanding improviser on the organ, and also as a somewhat challenged conductor of his forces. As the rector of the Thomasschule in Leipzig recalled in 1738, 'He keeps 30 or 40 musicians in order, one by a nod, another by stamping time with his foot, and a third with a warning finger, and joins in with his own voice ... at once notices when and where something is wrong ... and if there is any hesitation restores certainty.' But that doesn't tell us how the music sounded.

We may feel we know what Bach *should* sound like, but how far does that depend on the sonorities and traditions with which we grew up? We have come far enough in the continuing and sometimes acrimonious debate about period-performance styles to know that there is no single original to which a performer must aspire. There is a complicated interaction between the practices of the time, radical changes in performance and listening habits, and our desire to communicate today. What remains is our informed taste, shaped by involvement with the materials that Bach and his colleagues left behind, our understanding of the cultural and musical context that produced the music, and our own interpretative instincts and stylistic training. Or, as one of the pioneers of the Bach revival, the harpsichordist Wanda Landowska, put it rather more concisely, 'I study, I scrutinise, I love, and I recreate': quite a manifesto.

However, the most recent century of Bach performance has been different from others in one crucial respect: this has been the century of recording and broadcasting. Bach recordings provide a detailed guide to the seismic changes in Baroque performance in general, and of Bach in particular, that have taken place across these hundred and more years. But they



should be used with caution: like any surviving historical documents, these recordings have to be interpreted and understood in relation to their time. How typical were they? Or do they represent a reaction against the norms of the period? Importantly, this has not been a one-way process of performances simply being captured for posterity: recordings have themselves shaped and informed developments in performing techniques, redefining our taste.

The first recordings: small- and large-scale

The earliest Bach recordings are musical straws in the wind: we cannot tell whether Jules Conus's account of the first Minuet from Violin Partita No 3 recorded on October 4, 1892 (issued on 'The Dawn of Recording', from Ward Marston), represents a tradition, any more than Joseph Joachim's isolated and surprisingly purist accounts of two movements from the solo violin works, made in 1903, not long before his death. The start of the 20th century was the time when acute dissatisfaction began to be expressed with the way in which the large-scale choral society traditions of the previous century had dominated Bach performance.

George Bernard Shaw inveighed against 'our plan of compensating for the absence of some 10 or 11 skilful and sympathetic singers by substituting 10 or 11 hundred stolid and maladroit

ones, however strong-lunged the 10 or 11 hundred may be'.

One has to listen to recordings from after the First World War – so from the last century – for real evidence of performance style. The rumble of the old traditions can still be heard in the massive choral extracts from Bach's B minor Mass recorded under Dr Edward Bairstow at the Royal Albert Hall, London, in 1926, in cantatas recorded under Sir Hugh Allen at the 1928 Leeds Triennial Festival, and in motets recorded by the Bach Cantata Club with Charles Kennedy Scott: feeling is strong, the sound is impressive, but precision is not of the essence (the same spirit of communal music-making can be glimpsed as late as 1958 in Vaughan Williams's guidance of the Leith Hill Music Festival in the *St Matthew Passion*, reissued on Pearl). But this was also the period when Arnold Dolmetsch

Arnold Dolmetsch began to argue that music should be performed 'clothed in its own fur and feathers'



Glenn Gould (left) set the world alight with his recording of the Goldbergs (right), marking Bach's entrance into the mainstream



began to argue for historical performance styles that ensured the music was 'clothed in its own fur and feathers'.

Early orchestral interpreters, the individual virtuoso and popular transcriptions

The American guru of Bach recordings Teri Noel Towe has wisely warned against generalising about performance style from a few recordings by great distinctive interpreters (for the full discussion, visit bach-cantatas.com/teritowe). The famous account of the *St Matthew Passion* recorded in the Concertgebouw in 1939 under Willem Mengelberg has wild tempo fluctuations, massive ritardandos and passionate climaxes. But does this reflect the style of the time, or an individual insight? Towe points instead to recordings by Siegfried Ochs in the 1920s (very rapid and forward-moving in the opening of the *St Matthew Passion*) and the classic style of Hans Weisbach in the 1930s, both of which represent a much more restrained Leipzig-based tradition. That is also reflected in the radio recordings from the Thomanerchor of the 1930s under Karl Straube, which can be



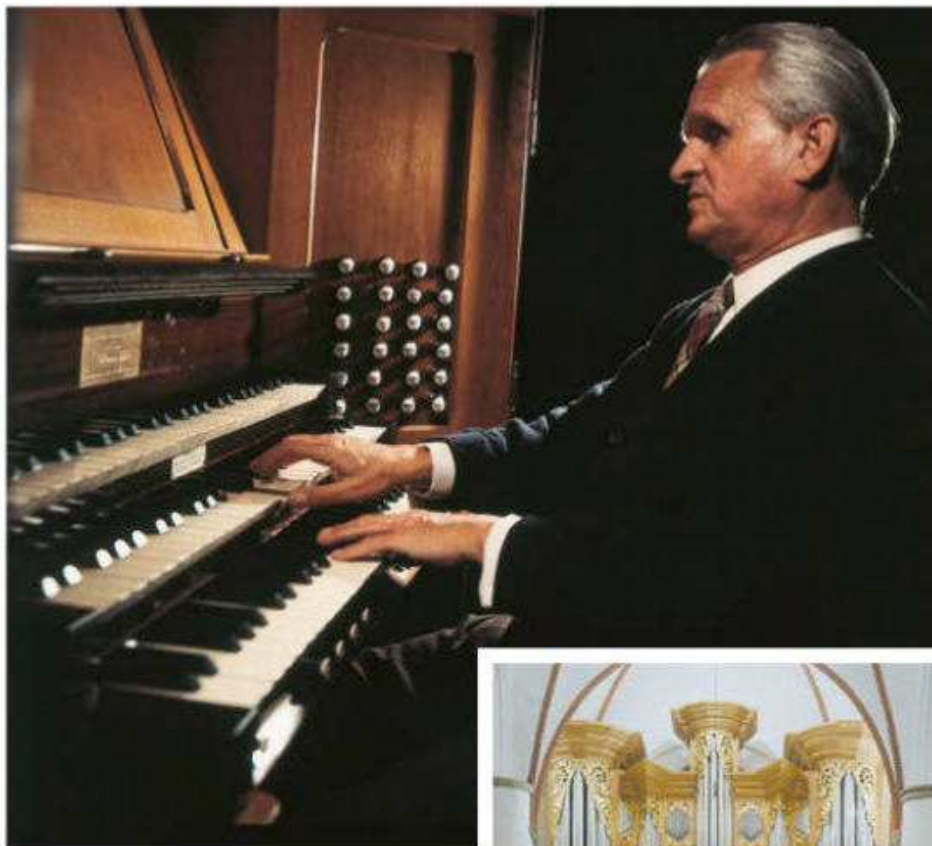
Scholarly: Neville Marriner's recordings were hugely successful, while Karl Richter was, likewise, an important Bach interpreter

Wanda Landowska recorded as early as 1908 (the first movement of the *Italian Concerto*), and her tremendous 1935 account of the *Chromatic Fantasia and Fugue* set a benchmark for

The clarity, transparency and impetus of Gould's Goldbergs captured the spirit of the times to an uncanny degree

the time. But equally musical, with a different elegance, is the Bach of the remarkable English harpsichordist Violet Gordon Woodhouse, who recorded Bach in the 1920s (Pearl). There were pianists too, including Harold Samuel, whose pristine performances from 1923 to 1927 (also Pearl) still carry real conviction. Edwin Fischer's legendary recordings of the complete '48' in the 1930s (Naxos) are still venerated by musicians. Dinu Lipatti recorded an isolated First Partita in 1950 (EMI) before his untimely death. But it was the appearance of the brilliant virtuoso Glenn Gould's first recording of the *Goldberg Variations* in 1955 for CBS that really set the world alight. Quite why this individual, quirky, penetrating account should have made the huge impact it did is a subject of its own, but its clarity, transparency and forward impetus captured the spirit of the times to an uncanny degree. This marked the moment when Bach entered the mainstream, and for a time in the 1960s it seemed as if Bach would infiltrate every corner of the pop repertoire, with the reinventions of Jacques Loussier, the Swingle Singers and the





Helmut Walcha (top) began his first Bach organ cycle at the Jacobikirche, Lübeck

Moog synthesiser, or the passion of Nina Simone, who said, 'Bach made me dedicate my life to music'.

Popular transcriptions, adapting Bach to the taste and genres of the time, actually reflected a rather different recorded tradition. Many mid-20th-century listeners knew Bach through the refashioning of his works on record by conductors and composers – Stokowski, Respighi, Schoenberg and Elgar – making them attractive in the age of orchestral technicolour. But slowly that development was implicitly criticised and overtaken by the growth of the neoclassical style and the flourishing of small-scale chamber orchestras and ensembles which claimed a purer approach. Adolf Busch made a pioneering recording of the *Brandenburg Concertos* in 1935 with Rudolf Serkin as the piano soloist on No 5 and the early-music pioneer August Wenzinger on the viola da gamba. 'An artistic sensation,' said *Gramophone*. This was a decisive new direction.

The scholarly approach: from Walcha to Richter

The scholarly approach found a voice in Deutsche Grammophon's Archiv Produktion, founded in 1947 by Dr Fred Hamel under the general policy of national heritage conservation. Strongly musicological in tone with its sober yellow covers and strictly organised recording periods, it was spearheaded by the conductor Fritz Lehmann until his premature death in 1956 and Hamel's the following year. The young Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau memorably recorded solo cantatas under Lehmann and Karl Ristenpart, and one of the most influential of all Bach recording projects began in 1947: the organ works under Helmut Walcha, recorded on appropriate instruments starting in the Jacobikirche in Lübeck. Blind from the age of 16, Walcha played from memory, and went on to record a magisterial complete cycle in stereo.

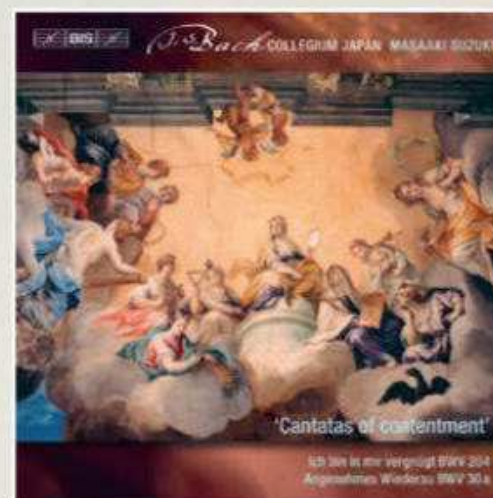
After Lehmann, the Archiv mantle passed to one of the most important Bach interpreters of the century, the conductor (and organist) Karl Richter. His Bach had clarity, forcefulness and



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Period-instrument practitioners: Musica Antiqua Köln and Reinhard Goebel (second from right); conductor John Eliot Gardiner

deep understanding. He worked with modern instruments and accomplished soloists such as Edith Mathis, Anna Reynolds and Ernst Haefliger; it was the discipline and attack of his Munich Bach Choir and Orchestra that made such a powerful impression, especially in his classic *St Matthew Passion* of 1958 with Haefliger, Keith Engen, Irmgard Seefried, Hertha Töpper and Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau – an interpretation whose monumentality has been challenged in our time only by Otto Klemperer's granite-like account of 1961 for EMI (with Peter Pears, Fischer-Dieskau, Elisabeth Schwarzkopf and Christa Ludwig).

The impetus had shifted towards the clean sound of period instruments, which in the 1980s seemed ideally suited to the new CD

Smaller-scale performances had become common in the UK, such as Paul Steinitz's pioneering work with his London Bach Society, too little of which was recorded, for Unicorn. Expert chamber-sized ensembles like the English Chamber Orchestra under Raymond Leppard for Philips and the Academy of St Martin in the Fields under Neville Marriner for Argo honed their 18th-century style within the prevailing traditions, and created Bach recordings which enjoyed huge success, as did those of Karl Münchinger's Stuttgart Chamber Orchestra.



Period performer Ton Koopman went solo after having worked with Herreweghe



Revolution from Harnoncourt and his followers

But revolution was in the air. Already in the 1950s Nikolaus and Alice Harnoncourt had formed their *Concentus Musicus Wien*, exploring performance on period instruments; and in 1954, Nikolaus Harnoncourt, with Gustav Leonhardt and colleagues, recorded Bach cantatas with the English countertenor Alfred Deller for Vanguard – a decisive moment. Working out of the limelight, Harnoncourt developed his ensemble until, in 1968, they recorded Bach's

B minor Mass for Telefunken's *Das Alte Werk*, a performance which caused huge controversy and inaugurated a new style for the following decades. Boys' voices in the choir with female soloists; period instruments with rasping horn and trumpets, skating strings, quirky oboes and burbling bassoons, all with light, transparent, dancing textures – this was a revelation, though it was one to which some critics and scholars found it difficult to adapt, and by which conventional performers on modern instruments justifiably felt threatened. The public had fewer problems, and lapped up this revitalised sound world.

The success of that project, and of the Passions and the *Brandenburgs*, led to the proposal to record all Bach's cantatas with Harnoncourt and Leonhardt through the 1970s for Telefunken *Das Alte Werk*. The appearance of this series year by year, in LP sets containing full orchestral scores, unlocked a new understanding of Bach for many of us. It was a thrilling time, full of the winds of change. The mid-1970s was the period when we heard radical sounds from Holland and Vienna; it was also the time of the formation of the first British period-instrument groups, of which the leader in Bach recorded performance was Trevor Pinnock's English Concert, again under the Archiv banner, with *Brandenburgs* and orchestral suites that quickly became the standard versions. Christopher Hogwood's Academy of Ancient Music on Decca *L'Oiseau-Lyre* and, later, John Eliot Gardiner's English Baroque Soloists on Philips followed, further expanding the Bach period-instrument discography.

Reinhard Goebel and Musica Antiqua Köln pushed things to the limit in their set of *Brandenburgs* for Archiv (which in 'Bach 333' is released on one disc for the first time), also recording *The Art of Fugue* and Bach's chamber music, adding fine accounts of music by Bach's family and contemporaries to reveal the context from which Bach grew. Ton Koopman and Philippe Herreweghe originally performed together and then went their own separate ways, each producing fine Bach cantata series – Koopman for Erato then Challenge, and Herreweghe for Harmonia Mundi then Collegium Vocale Gent's own label, PHI. Period instrumentalists gained in skill and confidence, and their versions began to dominate the record catalogues and BBC Radio 3's 'Building a Library' recommendations. Of course, modern instrument groups continued to record this repertory successfully, but somehow the impetus had shifted inexorably towards the bright, clean sound of period instruments, which in the 1980s seemed (not entirely coincidentally) ideally suited to the new CD.

J.S. BACH

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Rafael Puyana (centre) cultivated a heavyweight harpsichord sound, while Alfred Brendel, Martha Argerich, Murray Perahia and András Schiff helped resurrect Bach on piano

Shaking up choral music

It was the American scholar, pianist and conductor Joshua Rifkin who launched the next startling revolution in Bach performance with his contention in 1981 that Bach's expectation would have been for his 'choral' parts to be sung by one singer to a part. Launched with a recording of the B minor Mass for Nonesuch which claimed to be 'in the original version', his theories remain today the subject of considerable debate. But they produced some deeply musical results, and stimulated a reappraisal of the forces needed for all of Bach's vocal works. Rifkin recorded cantatas on Decca L'Oiseau-Lyre, and other leading examples included Andrew Parrott's outstanding B minor Mass for EMI and Paul McCreesh's *St Matthew Passion* for DG.

Among the conductors who have produced the most recent complete cycles of Bach cantatas, Gardiner (on DG and then his own label SDG) and Masaaki Suzuki (for BIS) do not agree with Rifkin's theory of one-to-a-part choral performance, preferring ensembles of 12 or 16 – but they do follow the principle that the sounds and textures of solo arias should complement rather than contradict those of the ensemble movements. Most recently, pointing forward to a new stylistic integration, John Butt's Dunedin Consort on Linn has mixed deep scholarship with exuberant performance.

Further evolutions: resurrecting the piano, freeing up the violin and enlivening the cello

One of the most unfortunate myths established by the early years of the period-instrument revival was that the harpsichord was the only suitable instrument for Bach's keyboard music, and as a result, the piano was cast into (fortunately temporary) outer darkness. The excitements of the heavyweight, quasi-orchestral harpsichords cultivated by the likes of Ralph Kirkpatrick, Rafael Puyana, the supremely musical Zuzana Růžicková and the brilliantly extrovert George Malcolm gave way to the leaner, more ascetic approach of Leonhardt and Kenneth Gilbert, and the younger generation of Pinnock (Archiv) and Christophe Rousset (L'Oiseau-Lyre). The variety of national approaches to the harpsichord is now endlessly stimulating, with Pierre Hantaï and Jean Rondeau from France, Rinaldo Alessandrini from Italy, and the Iranian Mahan Esfahani (now on DG) opening new horizons.

Elisabeth Schwarzkopf's expressive solos for Karajan are totally unlike the purist style of Agnes Giebel or Elly Ameling

Freed from the needless stigma of inauthenticity, pianists led by András Schiff have reclaimed this repertory. For Schiff's first piano recording of the *Goldbergs* on Decca, the harpsichordist Malcolm wrote a touching recommendation; Schiff's Partitas and second recording of the *Goldbergs* for ECM represent a peak of the Bach revival on the piano. Other pianists have since made wide-ranging contributions to the Bach discography: Murray Perahia on CBS (with a fine *Goldbergs*) and now DG (the *French Suites*), Angela Hewitt on Hyperion in all Bach's major keyboard works, and Maurizio Pollini and Pierre-Laurent Aimard on DG (the '48' and the *Art of Fugue*). Occasional individual forays, too, have been made by Martha Argerich, Ivo Pogorelich, Richard Goode, Alfred Brendel and Nelson Freire. Among the youngest generation, Benjamin Grosvenor

on Decca has recorded the Bach-Busoni Chaconne, and continuing interest in the art of transcription and reinvention has led to an endlessly fascinating Hyperion series. My own favourite, very

chaste, example remains György and Márta Kurtág's piano-duet version of the Sinfonia to Bach's Cantata No 106 (ECM), which they played at Ligeti's funeral.

A similar evolutionary impulse in Bach performance can be observed in the change in violin style from the unforgettably intense accounts of the Concerto for Two Violins by David and Igor Oistrakh (in several versions from the late 1950s and early 1960s) to the conversion of Viktoria Mullova from that solidly Russian style on her Philips recordings of 1992 to a lighter, flexible period-approach on her Onyx recording of the Sonatas and Partitas made from 2007 to 2008. On the cello, meanwhile, after Pablo Casals's almost sacral approach to the Suites, which he did so much to popularise, the supple, dancing style of the period cello pioneered by Anner Bylsma has inspired a range of lively players from Pieter Wispelwey to Steven Isserlis and David Watkin.

Singers: signifying an ever-evolving tradition

The range of Bach interpretations now available to us, as the new 'Bach 333' set demonstrates, is vast and varied. Great singers, for example, from every era of recording have engaged with Bach, and the results are not always predictable. Strong contrasts are present in each generation: Schwarzkopf's expressive solos for Herbert von Karajan are totally unlike the purist style of Agnes Giebel or Elly Ameling, and while some of us still cherish the technically challenged but eloquent

boy treble soloists of the 1970s, sopranos such as Emma Kirkby and now Dorothee Mields have created a new style. In the alto repertory, Kathleen Ferrier recorded a very moving *Agnus Dei* from the B minor Mass just before her early death, while the tradition of Helen Watts, Janet Baker and Anna Reynolds has led to the sharper-edged Anne Sofie von Otter and Magdalena Kožená, balanced by Bernarda Fink and the unforgettable Lorraine Hunt Lieberson. Whether or not the countertenor voice can be reliably associated with this repertory, René Jacobs, Paul Esswood, Andreas Scholl and now Iestyn Davies have decisively claimed the solo alto cantatas.

Performing traditions will continue to evolve in response to changing taste, new research, the development of instruments, the building of concert spaces, the means of distribution (live and recorded) and the behaviour of audiences. It would be very surprising if these elements did not have a major impact on our way of making music, but, given the availability of so many different idioms, we do not need to reject anything in the search for performances that speak to us today. As Landowska is (more unreliably) supposed to have said: 'You play Bach in your way, I will play him in his.' Now, with the treasure trove of varied performances in the 'Bach 333' collection at our disposal,



Three generations: contralto Kathleen Ferrier (centre), and mezzos Janet Baker and Magdalena Kožená

we can listen to him in our way, whatever that may be. Somewhere, we can be sure, he will be listening in his. **G**

Nicholas Kenyon is Managing Director of the Barbican Centre and author of the Faber Pocket Guide to Bach. He was a consultant to 'Bach 333: The New Complete Edition', a collection of 222 CDs and 1 DVD presented by DG in collaboration with Decca Classics, 30 other labels and the Leipzig Bach Archive; it is released on October 26 and is reviewed in this issue on page 100

BACH ON RECORD, PAST AND PRESENT

Recommended: 10 landmark Bach recordings, by artists from Pablo Casals to John Butt, reflecting our changing taste



Cello Suites
(rec 1936-39)
Pablo Casals *vc*
Warner Classics

The historic recording which, alongside Wanda Landowska's harpsichord recordings and the Busch Chamber Players' *Brandenburgs* with Rudolf Serkin, inaugurated the popular Bach revival on disc.



Organ works
(rec 1947)
Helmut Walcha *org*
Archiv

The beginning of the scholarly revival by Archiv of Bach's music performed on appropriate instruments: the blind organist made his first recording from Lübeck in 1947 and went on to record the complete organ works.



Cantatas
(rec 1954)
Alfred Deller
counterten
Various Ensembles /

Gustav Leonhardt,
Nikolaus Harnoncourt
Vanguard Classics

The first recording on period instruments of Bach cantatas, by Leonhardt and Harnoncourt who would go on to record a historic complete cantata cycle in the '70s.



Goldberg Variations
(rec 1955)
Glenn Gould *pf*
Sony Classical

This burst into the world as a revelation and became an iconic recording of our time. Gould's individual, penetrating take on Bach's great variations is performed in one compelling sweep - not surpassed by his later version.



St Matthew Passion
(rec 1958)
Sols; Munich Bach
Choir and Orchestra /

Karl Richter Archiv
This early Passion recording with Evangelist Ernst Haeffliger shows Richter's superbly disciplined forces at their most expressive, with an intensity matched only by Otto Klemperer's recording.



Mass in B minor
(rec 1968)
Soloists;
Concentus
Musicus Wien /

Nikolas Harnoncourt Warner Classics
The Bach performance that prompted a revolution: period instruments, boys' voices in the choir, transparent textures and dancelike clarity in Harnoncourt's new-minted vision.



Mass in B minor
(rec 1982)
Soloists;
The Bach
Ensemble /

Joshua Rifkin Nonesuch
The start of a massive Bach argument: Rifkin's one-to-a-part performance of the Mass and cantatas split critics and scholars, but has become increasingly influential with performers.



Brandenburg Concertos
(rec 1987)
Musica Antiqua Köln /
R Goebel Archiv

Following on from the success

of old-instrument Bach from Pinnock, Parrott and Hogwood, the second wave of historic Bach discs brought this extraordinarily racy take on the *Brandenburgs*.



Partitas Nos 1-6
(rec 2007)
András Schiff *pf*
ECM New Series
Schiff's most

recent recordings, such as the Six Partitas and the *Goldberg Variations*, together with his live performances of the '48' including at this year's BBC Proms (where he performed Book 2), have reasserted the central place of the piano in Bach performance.



St John Passion
(rec 2012)
Soloists;
Dunedin Consort /
John Butt

Linn Records
The latest development in historic performance style: John Butt's revealing interpretation reconstructs the Leipzig liturgy within which Bach's Passion would have been first heard.





Dreaming of CHOPIN

As a child, Ingrid Fliter found that listening to Chopin transported her to a magical world. Now, in his Nocturnes, she finds a darker side to the composer, as Jeremy Nicholas discovered

Ingrid Fliter never *decided* to be a concert pianist. 'It was just part of my life,' she says, 'though I didn't begin lessons until I was nine – quite old. Playing music was simply an extension of who I was. I couldn't wait to get back from school to practise the piano.

If I had been *told* I had to practise, knowing my personality, I would not have done it! I did it with a fascination for all this music in front of me. Every day, it was like unleashing a miracle.' *Gramophone* has been consistent in its admiration for Fliter.

In welcoming her recording of the complete Chopin waltzes back in December 2009, I felt that she set a new benchmark: 'From beginning to end, this is among the finest Chopin recordings of recent years.' Her recording of three Beethoven sonatas was an Editor's Choice in August 2011: 'It is wonderful indeed', wrote Bryce Morrison, 'to encounter a pianist of such exalted yet natural and unforced artistry.' And in November 2014, when Fliter's disc of Chopin's preludes was the Record of the Month, Harriet Smith placed Fliter in the same class as the greatest Chopin interpreters – Rubinstein, Cortot, Martha Argerich and Nelson Freire.

Fliter is by no means a prolific recording artist, but this has been a conscious choice: 'I record only when I feel I can say something about this music,' she says. 'Not for the sake of another number. I'm not interested in that.' This may also go some way to explain why, though much admired and respected in the music business and by piano cognoscenti, she is not as well known to the public at large as she deserves to be. Her name, by the way (pronounced 'Fleet-eh'), rather fortuitously reflects the owner's profession. She tells me it comes from 'fluter' – someone who plays the flute – and in Yiddish the 'u' sound becomes 'ee'. 'That is what I want to believe, anyway!' she laughs.

She lives near Lake Como. I flew out to Milan to meet her, instructed to rendezvous, *La Dolce Vita*-style, at the front of La Scala. It was one of the hottest days of the year. The vivacious and elegant Fliter had done some research while waiting for my delayed plane to land and had found us a quiet,

shaded courtyard cafe a few hundred yards away. Perfect. Iced coffee. It transpired we have several mutual friends. Gossip. Various pianists – their merits and faults. More gossip. She's articulate and open, and there is a refreshing gaiety about her. Laughter comes easily. More iced coffee. Eventually, I reminded myself that I was here to do an interview.

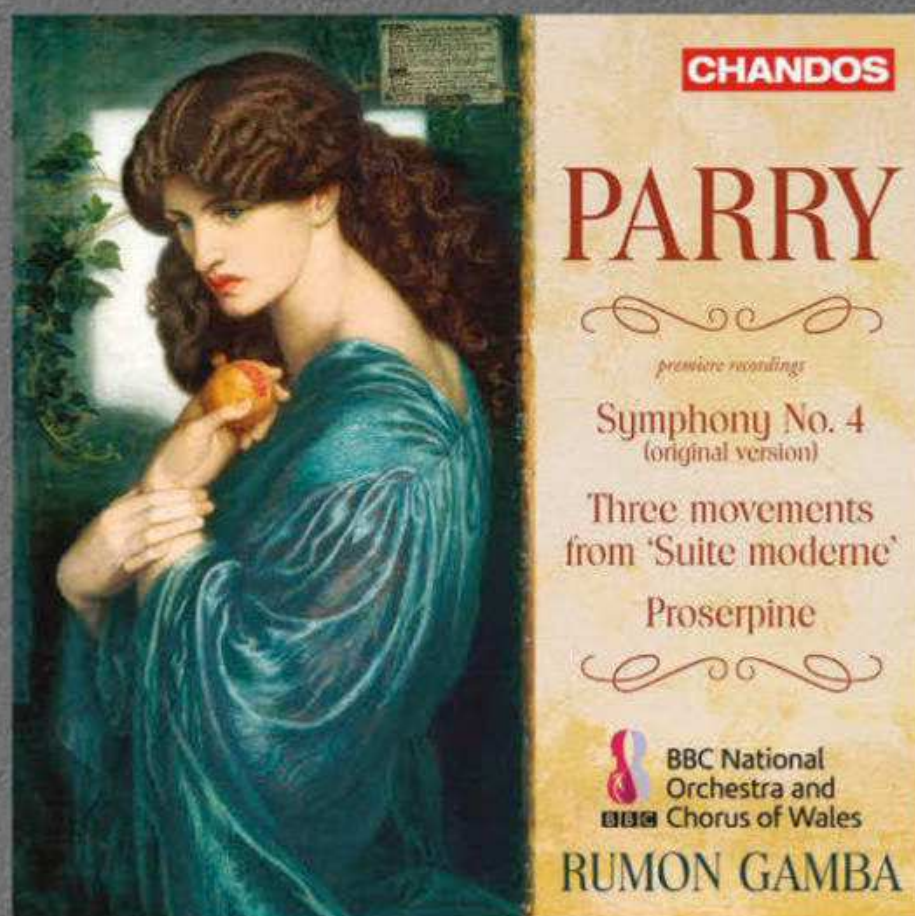
Fliter's latest recording is another disc of Chopin, this time the complete nocturnes. What is it about the composer for which she has such a natural affinity? To answer that, Fliter reaches back into her family history. She is part of that whole South American diaspora of Jewish immigrants, the second

'As much as Jewish people are connected to life, they're connected to death; as much as they're connected to smiling, they're connected to crying'

and third generations of which have given us the likes of Argerich, Daniel Barenboim, Bruno Leonardo Gelber, Sylvia Kersenbaum, Sergio Tiempo and Daniel Levy. Her maternal grandmother came from Lithuania (Poland at the time), her paternal side from Odessa. 'They all emigrated at the right moment, let's say, in the late 1920s, some to America, some, including my grandparents, to Argentina. They had nothing at all.' Her own father was a successful naval architect. 'Both he and my mother were music lovers and brought with them from Europe the importance of being related to art. Jewish people have a direct connection to the important, deep feelings in life without any filter. As much as they are connected to life, they are connected to death; as much as they are connected to smiling, they are connected to crying. Even in the major klezmer pieces there is always a little tear hidden. Never completely happy! I grew up with the sense that Europe was the centre of the culture that I wanted to be involved with – even though I was born in Argentina, the furthest-away country in the whole world! In any case, I did come from a heritage that was European.'

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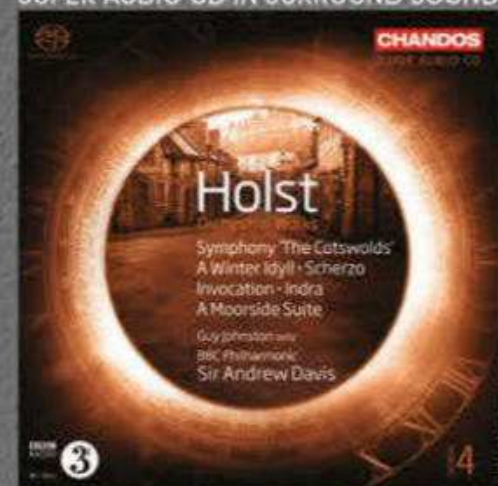
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STAY IN THE KNOW
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There was a piano in the house in Buenos Aires where she was born (1973), and the first thing she remembers was her father playing Chopin waltzes and nocturnes by ear. 'Not little tunes. Real music! And my mother had a marvellous voice. I'm not exaggerating. She would have loved to have been a professional, but at that time it was not so easy. As far as my parents' record collection was concerned, Rubinstein was the king. That's how I discovered piano music and Chopin in particular. I played his recordings everywhere I went. I was maybe six or seven. So by the time I started playing seriously, I already knew all the music. It was part of my language. I was not learning something strange – it was part of my everyday life. It was like floating – an un-connection with earth – when I listened. It was like dreaming – "life dreaming". It opens the door to a magic world that you don't really understand, but you feel that it's beautiful and you want to belong to it.'

Fliter's early recordings were for VAI and then EMI where her producer was John Fraser and her sound engineer was Philip Hobbs. Since 2014 she has been with Linn. After EMI/Warner Classics decided not to continue with her ('They had their own reasons,' says Fliter, graciously), she learnt that Hobbs was working for Linn and that Linn was interested in her. So Hobbs brought the two parties together. What was Warner's loss has indisputably been



Pure joy: Fliter becomes the first woman to win the Gilmore Artist Award in 2006

'I want to get a taste of Chopin as a real person with extremes, passion, blood in his veins and, yes, moments of meditation'

discover many other things, like the darker side of Chopin. "Nocturne" is not only about night. It's about when the noises of the day go away and whoever is writing or playing is in contact with the subconscious. There are no barriers. You are connected even more deeply to raw emotions. So a nocturne

is not necessarily the quiet moment of the day!

Fliter uses the Jan Ekier edition of the nocturnes.

'Very trustworthy. He has studied everything, all the manuscripts, everything

written by Chopin, and by his pupils. You see, I want to get a taste of Chopin as a real person with extremes, with passion, with blood in his veins, with eruptions of passion with, yes, moments of meditation and dreaming. All this put together makes a very complex character – and that becomes the sound, that becomes the expression. I didn't want to interpret these

nocturnes, or at least some of them, in a "comfort zone" way. I didn't want to smooth the edges. So that means being cruel sometimes. I wanted to explore the inner pain of Chopin. It's as important a side of him as the *bel canto* side, and this is, of course, one of the main keys to understanding his music.'

Chopin's nocturnes have been recorded many times. What special thing, I wondered, does she bring to the party? 'What I believe in is that I can be a storyteller through the composer and, without, I hope, sounding too pretentious, that I can try to become the music, as though it was composed in the moment. So I don't become the interpreter but part of what is happening. You hope that that feeling



Warner's loss, Linn's gain: Fliter records her first Chopin disc for the label – the two piano concertos – in 2014



When Ingrid Fliter listened to Chopin's music as a child, the reaction was immediate: 'It was like floating – an un-connection with earth. It was like dreaming – "life dreaming"'

will be conveyed to the public, direct to the heart, in the most clear way possible.'

Fliter was first taught by Elizabeth Westerkamp (she died only last year, aged 103), herself a pupil of Vincenzo Scaramuzza, the teacher of Enrique Barenboim (who taught his son Daniel) and Martha Argerich. In fact, it was her legendary female compatriot who changed Ingrid Fliter's life. Invited to a party in Buenos Aires which the notoriously elusive pianist had agreed to attend, Fliter had been primed to prepare something to play for her. 'Chopin's Third Sonata. Can you imagine? Why

something so difficult?! So, the party. It is finishing. Nobody is playing. Then the party organiser says, "OK – Martha you have to listen to someone." "Yes, of course," she said.

"No problem." She was in such a good mood! "OK, who is playing?" Nobody said a word. Everybody was too shy to play in front of her. But then I found myself saying, "I will." So I played the sonata. I don't remember if I played well, I was so nervous. At the very end of the party I went up to her and said, "Martha, give me some advice." "Well, you should come to Europe and study with my colleagues," she said. "I'll give you my apartment in Geneva. Come! Yes, yes. No problem." Just like that. So generous.'

That is when Fliter started her European life, studying with the Russian virtuoso Vitalij Margulis for a year at the Hochschule für Musik in Freiburg, then with Carlo Bruno in Rome and lastly at the Academy 'Incontri col Maestro' in Imola with Boris Petrushansky (Fliter's clarinettist husband Anton Dressler is his stepson). In 1998, she was one of the last three finalists in the Busoni Competition. On the jury was Zoltán Kocsis. He invited her to play with his orchestra the following

year. 'He booked me every year after that. He asked me to play the Bartók Sonata with him. Can you imagine what an honour that was? To play with such an artist! I was devastated when he died.' Two years later she won second prize (to Yundi's first) in the Chopin Competition – 'another thing I couldn't believe because it was a dream. I grew up with the image of Martha Argerich winning the Chopin Competition. And there I was playing the F minor Concerto in that same hall.'

Following that, in 2006 she became the fifth recipient – and the first woman – of the Gilmore Artist Award, presented every

four years to a concert pianist and totalling \$300,000 (\$250,000 of which is to be spent on career development). 'In the first 10 years after the Gilmore award I was playing maybe two hundred concerts

a year. And I lived every note that I played. It was a unique opportunity. I worked for 15 years like a crazy person. You can't imagine. But now I have learnt to say no and only do what really interests me, what challenges me. I don't mind how many concerts I do a year.

'What I have as an objective more and more is that in each concert I play – even if it's one a year, it doesn't matter – I am myself. You see, when we are kids, we artists have to live up to the expectations of our parents, then of our teachers, then of the juries, then of the public, then of the critics ... We always have to play to please someone. And that's the most wrong thing we can do as artists. We are ourselves when we go against everything that is expected of us. That's when we get in touch with who we are. That's the way we feel fulfilled. Not by giving one hundred concerts a year.'

► To read our review of Fliter's new Chopin CD, turn to page 66

'We always have to play to please someone. But we are ourselves only when we go against everything that is expected of us'



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The Vienna Philharmonic's April 2017 performance of Langgaard's Second Symphony at the Konzerthaus with soprano Anu Komi formed part of the Dacapo recording

DANISH *discovery*

The symphonies of an enigmatic Scandinavian composer are not the usual fare for an orchestra steeped in the central European symphonic tradition, but the Vienna Philharmonic's recent forays have been thrilling, says Andrew Mellor



This month, a niche Scandinavian label releases new recordings of music by a niche Scandinavian composer. Business as usual, you may conclude, were it not for the fact that the disc of two symphonies by the once-forgotten Danish eccentric Rued Langgaard has been cut by the Vienna Philharmonic. That's right, the Vienna Philharmonic: the physical embodiment of the central European symphonic tradition, an orchestra that knows what it likes and what it respects, and exercises considerable discretion in respect of both.

For a week each in 2017 and 2018, this illustrious orchestra explored Langgaard's Second and Sixth Symphonies respectively, playing both in the Konzerthaus's subscription series and recording them for release on Dacapo Records. 'Personally, I'm very excited about the quality of this music and about Langgaard as a composer,' says Harald Krumpöck, Geschäftsführer (managing director) of the Vienna Philharmonic, just minutes before taking his seat in the second violins for the orchestra's performance of the Second Symphony in April 2017. 'I think Langgaard is still to be discovered and absolutely *should* be discovered. He is a genius.'

Readers who double as Langgaard devotees will surely concur. They might also have clocked that Langgaard's Straussian Second Symphony is decidedly more luscious and central European in sound than it is cool and Scandinavian. But still, it's both bizarre and wonderful that Sakari Oramo's Langgaard recordings for Dacapo are to pop up midway through the Vienna Phil's steady stream of Beethoven, Mussorgsky and Mahler on Sony Classical and Deutsche Grammophon. Does the orchestra have a strategy when it comes to recording? 'We do think about strategy,' says Krumpöck, 'but then things come along that don't follow the strategy.'

One of them was the orchestra's recording of Per Nørgård's First and Eighth Symphonies, the start of its relationship with Dacapo. Many thought that project strange enough, including its own conductor, Sakari Oramo: 'I remember thinking, "What?! The Vienna Philharmonic and Per Nørgård?!"' Oramo exclaims when I ask how the project was sold to him.

But it was the quality of the music itself, with Dacapo's production values close behind, that induced the collaboration. 'I was in touch with the Vienna Philharmonic and had sent them some scores,' says Henrik Rørdam of Dacapo. 'One day, I received a very pleasant and cultivated email from Dieter Flury, the Geschäftsführer before Harald Krumpöck. He explained that the orchestra had been discussing our suggestion, and had concluded that Nørgård was a completely underrated composer in the German-speaking world and that they wanted to do something about it.'

Nørgård clearly paved the way for Langgaard. 'We all very much liked that recording and that music,' says Krumpöck, who travelled to London to accept a *Gramophone* Award for the enterprise in 2015, 'and so we looked closely at Langgaard when Dacapo subsequently brought that music to us. We are really quite curious when it comes to repertoire, all of us. Everyone is happy to discover something new, especially if it's good.'

I have never experienced a sense of "Why are we playing this?" from the Vienna Philharmonic' – Sakari Oramo

His comments might seem to fly in the face of the Vienna Philharmonic's reputation for conservatism, but on that front Oramo is a good impartial observer. 'The Vienna Philharmonic players have certainly realised in the last few years that it's good for them to open new doors. The orchestra has completely transformed in that respect and is 100 per cent committed when it takes on unusual repertoire. I have never experienced a sense of "Why are we playing this?" from them.'

Engagement, and a whole lot more, was apparent at the performance of Langgaard's Symphony No 2, *Spring Awakening*. The symphony, performed and recorded here in the original version from 1914, is an elaborate work cast in three movements, the last including an imposing solo soprano who recounts texts in German by Emil Rittershaus. It occupies a late Romantic idiom clearly influenced by Strauss, Wagner and perhaps even Schumann in its rollicking momentum and propulsive inner mechanism.

Hearing the piece rendered by the Vienna Philharmonic was thrilling indeed. The first movement's magnificent horn calls and resounding coalition of double basses and bass trombone have never, to my ears, sounded more resonant. I doubt they have for anyone, certainly not since the Vienna Symphony Orchestra played the piece across the road at the Musikverein in 1922. The final movement's endlessly weaving strings – under Anu Komsis's grand rendition of the soprano line – stood as a full-blooded reminder that this is the orchestra of Solti's *Ring*.

'I think that special string sound that the Vienna Phil has comes from playing all these operas,' suggests Oramo the day after the live performance of the symphony and the day before the sessions begin. Perhaps the most striking element of Oramo's interpretation was the breadth and depth he found in the symphony's central slow movement. Is that something he consciously sculpted or was it a result of the natural sound conditions? 'It came from three things,' says Oramo. 'Firstly the hall, which really allows it. Secondly the playing culture of the Vienna Phil, which is very sound-orientated and sets them apart from every other orchestra in the world. And thirdly because I wanted to approach the score as if it were a little like an improvisation; to bring out a little more of the rhapsodic in it.'

Langgaard's catalogue of 16 symphonies travels from the monolithic First, premiered by the Berlin Philharmonic under Max Fiedler in 1913 when the composer was just 19, to late works that are eccentric in every conceivable way – length, gait, tonality and philosophy. The Eleventh, performed by the BBC Symphony Orchestra at the 2012 Proms, lasts around five minutes and consists of little more than a single 'stuck' cadence. If the slightest signs of modernist rebellion peep through the Second, they start to appear in earnest in the Fourth. By the time of the Sixth – though Langgaard would, unfathomably, write neo-romantic symphonies even after the Eleventh – the language has changed altogether.

In the Sixth Symphony, subtitled *The Heaven-Rending* and completed in 1920 but later revised, the stylistically erratic Langgaard reacts to the music of Nielsen that he so frequently condemned in public. We hear destructive forces that are mostly absent from the youthful abandon of the Second and constitute a clear reaction to Nielsen's Fourth. Langgaard's biographer Bendt Viinholt Nielsen has compared the language of the symphony to music that Hindemith wrote – 'but later on'. 'This is something very different,' says Oramo. 'It reminds me of Vaughan Williams in some ways; it's very austere and very intense, often with only two or three voices, certainly not this lush texture.'

At the time of the recording of the Second Symphony, Oramo insisted that the Vienna Phil would take to the Sixth just as naturally, even if there's no doubting the closeness of the Second's language to the orchestra's inherent sound and tradition. Langgaard always enjoyed more success in

the German-speaking world than he did in Scandinavia, and arguably had the sound of central European orchestras in his mind for all his orchestral music – a sign not only of his musical preferences, but also of his almost total disenfranchisement from the Danish music scene.

'I'm sure the orchestras here, in Germany and Austria, were better at that time, which had something to do with it,' says Oramo. 'It's the same with Sibelius. He admired the Viennese orchestral sound and I think, soundwise, the Vienna Philharmonic is the best Sibelius orchestra in the world, even if they don't know the music as well as some others.'

Oramo's comments put an interesting slant on the notion

that a Viennese orchestra performing Nordic music is somehow the wrong way round. 'We always talk about northern music in the light of northern expressivity, and when we hear Nordic

orchestras playing Nordic repertoire, there's certainly something to it,' says Preben Iwan, Dacapo's producer not just for this recording but for the Nørgård project and the label's full cycle of Langgaard's symphonies under Thomas Dausgaard. 'But some years ago I started to think, "Is that really right? I'd love to hear some of our music played by a very, very good central European orchestra."' In the case of Nørgård, the music actually asks for it – the symphonies have this broad, deep sound as opposed to the lighter sound we perhaps have up here.'

There's no doubting the difference in sound the Vienna Philharmonic brings to both composers. But perhaps even more important, from both a recording industry and repertoire expansion point of view, is prestige. 'I am quite sure that working with the Vienna Philharmonic on Langgaard – in a similar way

'I thought, "I'd love to hear some of our music played by a very, very good central European orchestra"' – Preben Iwan, Dacapo



Sakari Oramo conducts the Vienna Philharmonic playing Langgaard's music at the Vienna Konzerthaus – 'making Danish music better known in the world'



Rued Langgaard in 1918, in his twenties

to working with the New York Philharmonic on Nielsen – is having an impact on the way the world is looking at these composers,’ says Rørdam.

Perhaps that’s why Dacapo has managed to attract the investment from private foundations in Denmark which has paid for the projects. But the effect on the label has been significant too. ‘Our levels of recognition have completely changed since we started working with orchestras of this calibre,’ says Rørdam. ‘We are viewed differently externally and internally, and within the Naxos family (Naxos being Dacapo’s distributor). Naxos’s CEO Klaus Heymann thinks I am insane for spending money on these projects, but Dacapo is now considered an international label.’

‘I’m quite sure that this is having an impact on the way the world is looking at these composers’ – Henrik Rørdam, Dacapo

So what of the Vienna Philharmonic? As I leave Krumpöck’s office in the Musikverein, he hands me a pile of CDs – all of them Sony Classical or DG. ‘Recording is still important for us, but the business has changed,’ he says. ‘Today it’s less about making a conductor or soloist famous, and more about orchestras recording projects from their concert schedules and recording live, which as a musician I am very happy about.’ He dismisses any talk of the orchestra establishing its own recording arm. ‘The labels we work with are very passionate and very competent. We are happy to do our job and let them do theirs,’ he says.

But that only works if you have the pulling power of the Vienna Philharmonic, and have offers from such labels piling up on your desk almost every day of the week. Krumpöck refers once more to the Nørgård project: ‘It was so well balanced, the sound of that recording, and really so very interesting for us,’ he repeats. Next to the discs he has handed me – *Pictures at an Exhibition* from Gustavo Dudamel, the New Year’s and Summer Night’s Concerts recorded live and Jonas Kaufmann’s solo rendition of Mahler’s *Das Lied von der Erde* – it’s easy to see why he might conclude as much. But curiosity and quality only count for so much, certainly when you run the numbers. ‘This is all due to the extraordinary willingness of some institutions to make Danish music better known in the world,’ says Oramo. ‘Wherever the funds come from, they are being used very well.’

The Vienna PO’s recording of Langgaard will be reviewed next issue

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MUSIC

GRAMOPHONE

RECORDING OF THE MONTH

Harriet Smith listens to revelatory Chopin and Schubert from Steven Isserlis and Dénes Várjon, and admires the beauty and passion they bring to this great music



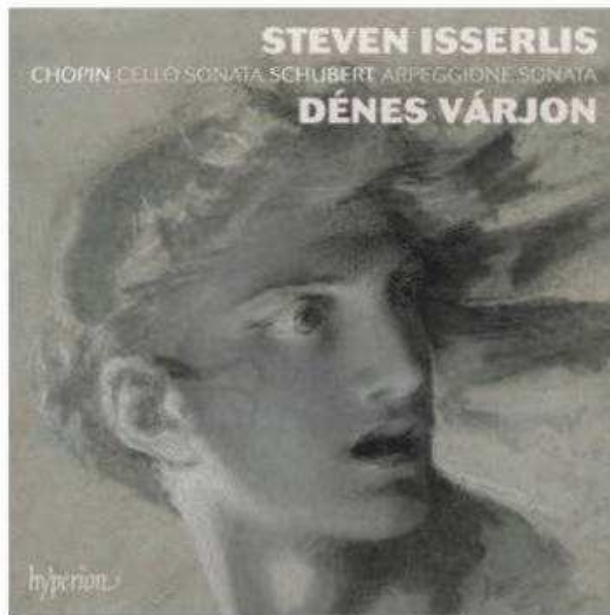
Chopin • Schubert • Franchomme

Chopin Cello Sonata, Op 65. Introduction and Polonaise brillante, Op 3. Nie ma czego trzeba, Op 74 No 13 (arr Isserlis) **Franchomme** Nocturne, Op 15 No 1 **Schubert** Arpeggione Sonata, D821. Nacht und Träume, D827 (arr Isserlis)
Steven Isserlis *vc* **Dénes Várjon** *pf*
Hyperion © CDA68227 (77' • DDD)

Can it really be 10 years since Steven Isserlis and Dénes Várjon proved a wonderfully innate partnership with their disc of Schumann cello music (5/09)? This new disc is every bit as impressive, perhaps even more so.

The very first thing we hear is the beautiful 1851 Érard, as Várjon launches into Chopin's *Introduction and Polonaise brillante* (the pitch a tad lower than modern-day concert tuning). The two players bring to the Introduction a sense of freedom – consoling one moment, delicate the next, and then altogether more mournful – and the composer's high-lying filigree in the keyboard has an effortless fluidity. The Polonaise struts its stuff without ever sounding effortful, with Isserlis's pizzicatos really pinging through the texture. Passagework that, in some hands, can seem like mere stuffing is here never less than scintillating. Gautier Capuçon and Martha Argerich are, true to form, more extreme in this work, the polonaise rhythms exuberant, perhaps too much so, with Capuçon favouring a more full-on vibrato.

Isserlis always plans his programmes painstakingly, and here makes a case for Auguste



'We get a real sense of give and take, Isserlis and Várjon giving Chopin's lines a pliable quality that brings them to life'



Late masterpiece: Chopin's Cello Sonata has rarely had such telling advocacy

Franchomme – cellist, composer and faithful friend of Chopin's – whose C minor Nocturne is an elegant affair, melodically charming if not harmonically particularly striking. But you couldn't imagine it being better played and it certainly doesn't outstay its welcome.

This forms a neat link from Chopin in *brillante* mode to his last published masterpiece, the Cello Sonata. I have to confess that I've sometimes felt that this can sound meandering with its first-movement repeat (a sensation I had with Alban Gerhardt and Steven Osborne, also on Hyperion, who at times sound uncharacteristically unconvincing in this work). But not here: one of the discoveries Isserlis mentions in the notes – his usual mix of quiet erudition, enthusiasm and self-deprecating humour – is that the

tempo for this movement shouldn't be *Allegro moderato* but *Maestoso*, which gives it a quite different mood.

We get a real sense of give and take from the off, Isserlis and Várjon giving Chopin's lines a pliable quality that brings them to life, while the beautiful second subject is given time to breathe, to rapturous effect, the two players taking the dynamics right down. Throughout, the Érard is the ideal vehicle for conveying the airiness of Chopin's filigree passagework, while the two musicians relish the moments of stillness in Chopin's more inward writing.

The Scherzo dances with a rare sense of ease, Isserlis surmounting the shifts in register effortlessly and the climaxes never becoming overblown even when Várjon



Steven Isserlis, with strong support from pianist Dénes Várjon, brings intense beauty and character to Chopin and Schubert, from rapture to poignancy

is playing at full pelt. The slow movement has the intensity that du Pré and Barenboim bring to it, which is rather lacking in the hands of Gerhardt and Osborne, yet it never feels overstated, Isserlis letting the plangency of the cello's phrases speak for themselves, and while the tempo is unhurried the sense of forward motion is unerring. The finale is another place where the choice of piano makes a great difference to the overall effect – on a modern instrument it's all too easy for the piano to overwhelm. But here Várjon can play out, which he does to joyous effect.

Their Schubert Arpeggione is similarly thoughtful and full of details that so often pass by unnoticed. Isserlis talks in the notes of the work's 'immense, if understated, sadness' and that is beautifully brought to life here, from the aching introduction onwards. The cellist and pianist of Trio Dali impressed me in this work a while back, similarly yearning yet also capturing the sonata's moments of geniality. The

slow movement on this new account perfectly balances rapture, simplicity and beauty, the dynamic shadings used to potent effect. The finale, too, is not simply the consoling affair it can be, but full of poignant asides.

As a bonus we get two song transcriptions in Isserlis's own arrangements; Chopin's Op 74 No 13 conjures a mood of great tragedy within its brief span, while Schubert's 'Nacht und Träume' has a beseeching quality that is simply irresistible. Hyperion's engineers have given the two players a fine recording, detailed and immediate.

Even among Isserlis's many fine discs, this one stands out. And if you still need convincing that the Chopin Cello Sonata is a total masterpiece, this is the recording to do it. **G**

Chopin Cello Sonata – selected comparisons:

du Pré, Barenboim (2/73^R) (EMI/WARN)

586233-2 or 091934-2

Gerhardt, Osborne (11/08) (HYPE) CDA67624

Chopin Introduction and Polonaise – selected comparison:

G Capuçon, Argerich (EMI/WARN) 607367-2

Schubert Arpeggione Sonata – selected comparisons:

La Marca, Savary (10/11) (FUGA) FUG584

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Editor's Choice

Martin Cullingford's pick of the finest recordings reviewed in this issue

Orchestral



Harriet Smith explores the minor delights of Bronsart and Urspruch:

'In the tarantella finale, even a call to order in the form of a loud fanfare cannot displace the mayhem for long' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 38**



Andrew Mellor zens out with the latest from Anne Akiko Meyers:

'Lauridsen's own arrangement of O magnum mysterium reveals how much it owes to the open-prairie sound of Copland' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 49**

JS Bach

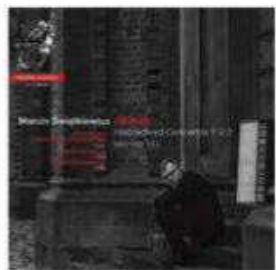
Keyboard Concertos – No 1, BWV1052; No 2, BWV1053; No 3, BWV1054

Marcin Świątkiewicz *hpd*

Zefira Valova, Anna Nowak-Pokrzywińska *vns*

Dymitr Olszewski *va* **Tomasz Pokrzywiński** *vc*

Channel Classics © CCS40418 (56' • DDD)



Rarely have I clapped ears on a new Bach harpsichord concertos offering and heard

such a distinctively characterful and exuberantly flowing sound right from the opening bars. However, when you consider that Marcin Świątkiewicz was the harpsichordist who in 2015 shone an attractively characterful and joyous light on the little-known keyboard concertos of Johann Gottfried Mützel (BIS, 6/15), then it all clicks into place.

Everything here has been meticulously and knowledgeably thought through, beginning with Świątkiewicz's having used a different, brilliantly judged keyboard for each work: for the D minor Concerto a darkly resonant German instrument with a 16-foot register; for the E major a more delicate French model; and a jewel-toned Flemish model for the D major.

Świątkiewicz's forces are based on the string-quartet-without-double-bass model Bach used at his Friday-night Café Zimmermann concerts in Leipzig. First impressions aren't of a lean chamber sound at all: its crispness comes so very glowingly warm and full-textured. Yet you can also hear every musician – good news when the ensemble is topped by Il Pomo d'Oro concertmaster Zefira Valova and underpinned by Tomasz Pokrzywiński, Arte dei Suonatori and Holland Baroque's principal cellist – and there's no question that the sound's strikingly light-footed, flowing and liberated quality is the reward of gifting such a crack team of period specialists complete autonomy over their individual parts. Świątkiewicz himself leads this gloriously unleashed character: nimble

and brilliant, and with a subtle push and pull which drives rather than slows the overall momentum. He's fearless with his touch, too, putting his full weight behind his *fortes* to maximise dynamic contrasts.

As for embellishments, the musicians are following instincts rather than a literal reading of the score. The strings in the D major Concerto's final *Allegro* are a wonderful example of the life and personality this enables. Listen to their joyous little tucked embellishments and savour especially Valova's cheeky folkly upwards inflections at 2'12".

And all this without anybody ever sounding like they're taking scholarly liberties. *Au contraire*, this simply feels like music-making fully in the spirit of those Leipzig Friday nights. **Charlotte Gardner**

Bartók • Enescu

Bartók Violin Concerto No 1, Sz36^a

Enescu Octet, Op 7^b

Vilde Frang, ^b**Erik Schumann**, ^b**Gabriel**

Le Magadure, ^b**Rosanne Philippens** *vns*

^b**Lawrence Power**, ^b**Lily Francis** *vas* ^b**Nicolas**

Altstaedt, ^b**Jan-Erik Gustafsson** *vcs* ^a**Radio**

France Philharmonic Orchestra / Mikko Franck

Warner Classics © 9029 56625-5 (58' • DDD)



Absolutely stunning.

Had the Heifetz-Piatigorsky team tackled Enescu's string

Octet, I doubt that they would have topped this version by Vilde Frang and friends. Although a relatively early work, the Octet has in common with Brahms's early chamber music a striking level of maturity, the opening motif setting the scene for a 37-minute roller coaster that en route takes in warmth, Bartókian aggression, interrupted calm and, to close, a sort of *valse macabre* at top speed. Furthermore, the thematic material that Enescu conjures is invariably memorable.

Frang is joined by seven top-ranking players (including viola player Lawrence Power) who, in the fiery second movement

especially, make expressive capital out of Enescu's dizzily interweaving textures. Interesting too how the transition from that same movement to the initially tranquil *Lentement* third movement resembles, in its effect, the parallel shift from 'storm' to 'shepherd's hymn' in Beethoven's *Pastoral* Symphony. Enescu's string-writing often has a Regerian complexity about it, though, unlike Reger, endless modulation isn't a feature of his style. What most absorbs me about this wonderful piece are its rich ingredients, an aspect that Frang and her collaborators appear to relish to the full. There are other versions available – including an excellent online live performance led by Janine Jansen – but none quite matches Frang's team for spontaneity, ardour and keenness of attack.

In an ideal world, I would have preferred more Enescu (a violin sonata, perhaps) as a fill-up rather than Bartók's First Concerto, especially considering a plethora of fine Bartók concerto recordings that has appeared in recent years. Still, Frang again hits the target, especially in the *Allegro giocoso* second movement, which she plays with lightning inflections, switching in a trice from breathless animation to sighing lyricism, always with a light touch. For me this music epitomises the heady excitement of youthful infatuation (such as I remember it!) and Mikko Franck draws consistently alert playing from his French players. Sound quality throughout is first rate, so I predict a potential *Gramophone* Awards nominee for 2019. Fingers crossed.

Rob Cowan

Bernstein

'Broadway to Hollywood'

Candide – Overture. Fancy Free. On the Town – The Great Lover; Lonely Town. On the Waterfront – Symphonic Suite. West Side Story – Symphonic Dances

Hanover Philharmonie / Iain Sutherland

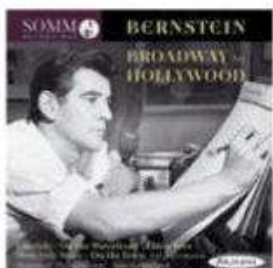
Somm Ariadne © ARIADNE5002 (75' • AAD)

Recorded live in the studios of NDR

Radiophilharmonie, Hanover, 1993



Intimacy and transparency: Alisa Weilerstein and the Trondheim Soloists gives outstanding accounts of Haydn and Schoenberg – see review on page 40



For its Bernstein centenary tribute, Somm's historical label Ariadne has released a series of previously unavailable NDR broadcasts from Hanover in 1993, conducted by Iain Sutherland, best known in the UK, perhaps, for his work with the BBC Concert Orchestra, most notably for Radio 2's *Friday Night is Music Night* and more recently with his own Iain Sutherland Concert Orchestra for Classic FM. His considerable credits elsewhere, meanwhile, include broadcasts of classic musicals, both for the BBC and NDR, the foundation of the City of Glasgow Philharmonic in 1988 and a long association with the English Haydn Festival, of which he was Principal Guest Conductor for 10 years from 1999.

His Bernstein is strong and trenchant, often exhilarating, never sentimental. The dances from *West Side Story* blend energy with restraint, the opening bristling with tension, the Mambo hard-driven and electric, the 'Somewhere' *Adagio* clean and very reined in. *On the Waterfront* is dark and brooding throughout, fierce

and angry at the start, full of grand passion later on. The booklet notes tell us that *Fancy Free* comes complete but in fact the *pas de deux* and the Galop and Waltz have been cut, which is a great shame, since the performance is witty and unforced, the sleazy bar-room atmosphere nicely caught and maintained.

The playing, meanwhile, is enthusiastic if raw round the edges in places. The brass are very big-band and full-on, though the horn solo at the start of *On the Waterfront* is smooth, Mahlerian, and a bit too polite. Textures can sometimes be dense, particularly in the *Candide* Overture, which ideally needs to be lighter on its feet. The sound quality is clear if variable. We're not told when the individual performances were taped, but the dances from *West Side Story* and *On the Town* get the warmer, better balanced recordings: elsewhere the bass is sometimes heavy and the brass a bit too far forwards.

Tim Ashley

Bizet • Debussy • Ravel

Bizet Symphony Debussy Fantaisie^a

Ravel Ma Mère l'Oye - Suite

^aAndrew von Oeyen *pf*

Prague Philharmonia / Emmanuel Villaume
Warner Classics © 9029 56259-3 (72' • DDD)

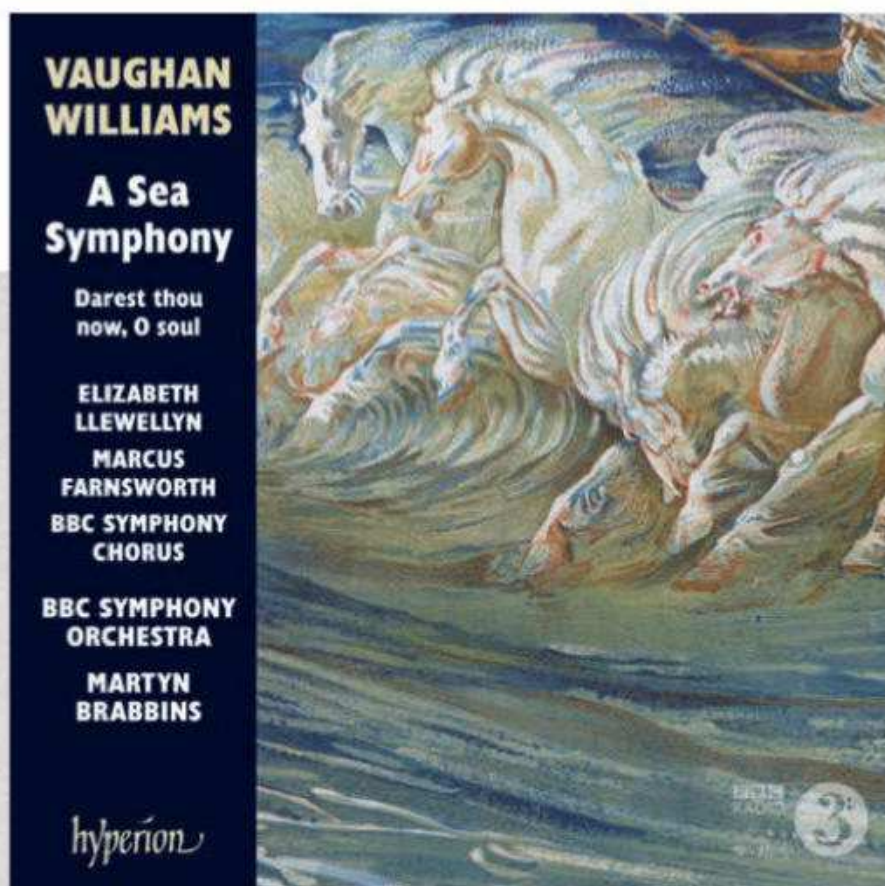


Opinions differ about Debussy's *Fantaisie*, his only work for piano and orchestra, completed in 1890. Self-critical as always, Debussy himself was seemingly in two minds about it: after stating that he thought the finale weak, he nevertheless withdrew the score ahead of its premiere, when Vincent d'Indy, scheduled to conduct, insisted on giving the first movement on its own. It remained unperformed until 1919.

Despite the title, the work is essentially a piano concerto in Franckian cyclic form, and in a booklet note for his new recording with Alexander von Oeyen, Emmanuel Villaume argues that more pianists would be drawn to it if Debussy had simply designated it as such. The bravura solo writing, however, remains controversial. Stephen Walsh, in his recent study of the composer, describes it as 'showy' in ways that are essentially foreign to much of his output, a criticism that is difficult to dismiss despite the attractiveness of the thematic material and the work's striking harmonic language.

Von Oeyen's style, weighty yet elegant, suits it wonderfully well, though. There's

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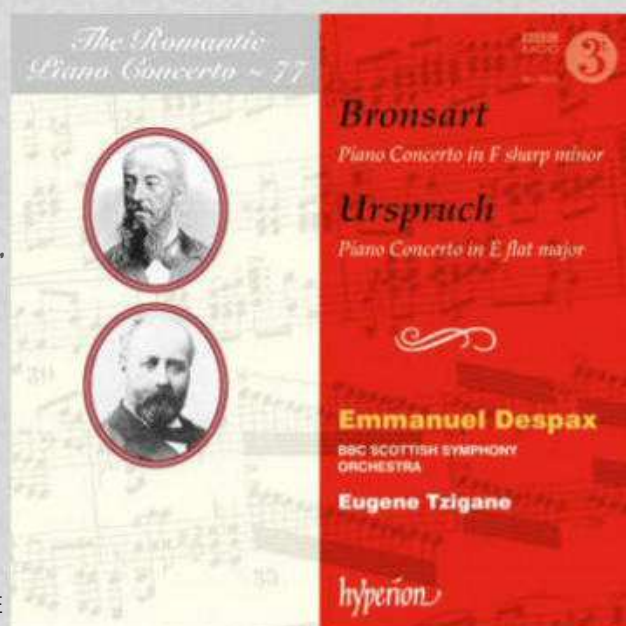
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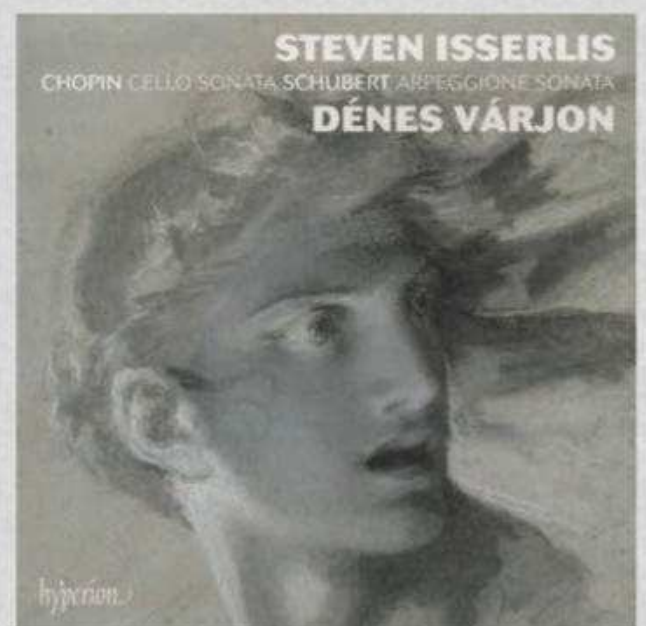
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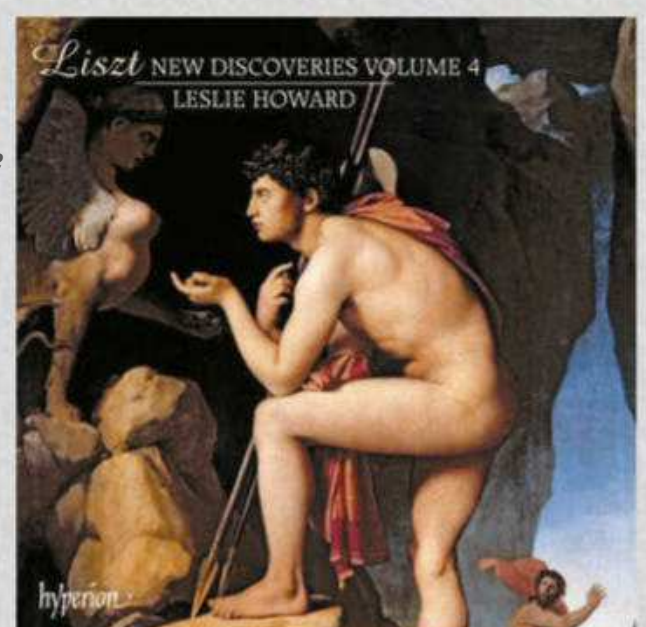
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reflection as well as bravado in the opening movement, while the central *Lento* really is *molto espressivo*, becoming darker and increasingly introspective as it progresses. Villaume's conducting similarly blends refinement with élan, and his Prague orchestra are on fine form, the strings beautifully sensuous, the woodwind gracefully poised. Von Oeyen's treatment of the finale, meanwhile, dispatched with breezy wit over pizzicato basses sounding positively jazzy, makes you question Debussy's judgement about its inferiority to the rest of the score.

It's an impressive achievement, as is the performance of *Ma Mère l'Oye* that accompanies it. Villaume takes the work faster than some, and gives us a very adult interpretation that looks back nostalgically at childhood even as it recreates its wonder and unease. It's exquisitely played and the emotional ambiguities are all immaculately judged: Petit Poucet, lost in his forest, sounds very sad, and Beauty responds to her Beast with a mixture of disquiet and genuine fascination.

So it's a shame that the third work here, Bizet's Symphony in C, doesn't quite achieve the same level of finesse. Bizet took Gounod's Symphony in D as his model, though Villaume steers the score closer to Beethoven or Schubert, and the end result is at times heavy-footed and oddly charmless. Recommended for the Debussy and the Ravel, but you need, perhaps, to look elsewhere if Bizet is your main focus of interest. **Tim Ashley**

Brahms

Symphony No 3, Op 90. Alto Rhapsody, Op 53^a. Six Hungarian Dances from WoO1 (orch Dausgaard). Six Schubert Songs (arr Brahms)^b

^aAnna Larsson *contr* ^bJohan Reuter *bar*

^aMale Voices of the Swedish Radio Choir;

Swedish Chamber Orchestra / Thomas Dausgaard

BIS (F) BIS2319 (78' • DDD/DSD • T/t)



More muscular, immediate Brahms here from Thomas Dausgaard's

Meiningen-sized Swedish Chamber Orchestra but, where the previous two instalments (the first two symphonies – 4/13, 2/18) have been blessed with invigorating momentum, this performance of the Third is more problematic. The sound of the two opening chords is arresting and fresh but ultimately the chords themselves don't prove as energising as they could – first because the string entry that follows lacks follow-

through impact in an orchestra of this size; second because we feel external forces too obviously manipulating the general energy flow, in place of the internal machinations of the music itself (born of those atomic chords).

Throughout the opening *Allegro*, the feeling persists that the source of the music's momentum is not as organic as it could or should be – that sometimes it's too obviously coming from the forcing hand of the conductor. The best movement is the last; not over-driven (unlike the *Andante*) and benefiting from the cut-through of the winds, especially in those pivotal moments when they control of the agenda. As before, the SCO are delectable when the textures become polyphonic but, in this emotionally heavier work, it can be frustrating when that polyphony isn't paid off with real churning depth (especially from the strings).

None of that stops this series being ever illuminating and an added benefit here is in the generous fill-ups. Dausgaard's own orchestrations of the *Hungarian Dances* Nos 11-16 are infectious, by turns rustic and syrupy (the conductor's trademark push-and-pull is at its mesmerising best in No 16). There's a slight lack of repose in the tight choral sound of the *Alto Rhapsody*, where a larger, more breathy, amateur chorus would offer more of a blanket embrace than the men of the Swedish Radio Choir. Anna Larsson is a little blustery in the rhapsody and can be approximate in her contribution to three of Schubert's Six Songs in Brahms's arrangement, but Johan Reuter's three make a huge impact. His Beethovenian insistence and focus in 'An Schwager Kronos' is thrilling and the colour gradations in his 'Griesengesang' – over grainy low winds and strings – is remarkable. All of this is worth hearing; Reuter's singing, totally united with the orchestra, is rather more. **Andrew Mellor**

Brahms

Four Symphonies. Two Serenades

Tapiola Sinfonietta / Mario Venzago

Sony Classical (B) 3 19075 85311-2 (3h 41' • DDD)



Mario Venzago's recordings of Bruckner symphonies with the Tapiola Sinfonietta and other chamber orchestras raised eyebrows and furrowed brows. I doubt his Brahms will provoke much if any controversy. It's now more than two decades since the release of Charles

Mackerras's pioneering set with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra – discs that were clearly labelled 'in the style of the original Meiningen performances', presumably to assure buyers that there was historical precedence behind the notion of a smallish orchestra playing the canonical Brahms four. Paavo Berglund followed suit with the Chamber Orchestra of Europe, Thomas Dausgaard is engaged in an ongoing series with the Swedish Chamber Orchestra (see above) and the SCO has recently re-recorded the cycle, this time with Robin Ticciati.

Setting these recordings' disparate interpretative perspectives aside, I believe it's safe to assert that their common goal in employing a reduced string section is textural clarity – or, as Venzago puts it in his explanatory booklet note, 'a focus on woodwind'. Strange, then, that his accounts are not notable for their lucidity. Even in the D major Serenade, a work squarely in the purview of a chamber orchestra, the winds often get swamped even by this smallish sea of strings. Whether this is the fault of the conductor or the engineers, I can't say. I'll wager, however, that the violins' glassy sound is an engineering issue and unrelated to their sparing use of vibrato. Indeed, the Tapiola Sinfonietta play with impressive unanimity and conviction for Venzago, whose direction demands suppleness as much as precision.

Those put off by some unusual tempos in this conductor's Bruckner cycle will find nothing so outlandish here. Even when Venzago sets a brisk pace, as in that First Serenade's *Adagio non troppo* or the Second Symphony's *Allegretto grazioso*, he allows the phrases room to breathe so there's no feeling of undue haste. It's in music that requires tautness and drive that these readings tend to fall short, so the inner movements are generally the most persuasive. All four slow movements are absolutely ravishing, in fact, each evoking an individual world of character and colour, from the First's lyrical abandon to the Fourth's elegiac solemnity. The *Poco allegretto* of the Third is drenched in melancholy – listen to the way the cello's opening melody captures the very essence of that elusive *mezza voce* marking, and the halting phrases when the violins take the tune near the end, as if they can't bear to let go of it. I'm also delighted by the way Venzago juggles the accents in the *Allegro giocoso* of the Fourth so its rhythms practically froth.

The most successful overall performances are of the Second and Fourth symphonies and the First Serenade. I wish Venzago was less

subdued in the Second's finale – all those manic *forte* explosions are underplayed – although he does finally let loose in the coda, so it ends satisfyingly, at least. The opening *Allegro non troppo* of the Fourth is astonishingly delicate; I've never heard anything like it and, a few distractingly lurching tempo changes aside, its eloquence took me by surprise.

So where does that leave us in terms of Meiningen-style Brahms? Ticiatti too often gets lost in his pursuit of detail; Mackerras's flexible approach to tempo (borrowed from markings by the composer's friend, Fritz Steinbach) can feel contrived; and Dausgaard's series, while largely impressive thus far, remains incomplete (BIS, 4/13, 2/18, and above). That leaves Berglund, who illuminates without casting any distracting shadows or glare. Actually his is one of but a few wholly recommendable cycles, and that's saying something. I'll be hanging on to Venzago's set, however, not so much for entire works but for when I want to luxuriate in one of the exquisitely played middle movements. **Andrew Farach-Colton**

Symphonies – selected comparisons:

SCO, Mackerras (10/97) (TELA) CD80450

COE, Berglund (8/01) (ONDI) ODE990-2T

SCO, Ticiatti (4/18) (LINN) CKD601

Bronsart • Urspruch

'The Romantic Piano Concerto, Vol 77'

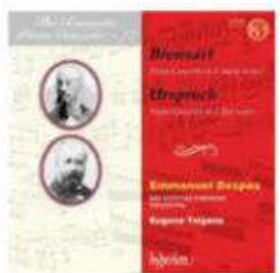
Bronsart Piano Concerto, Op 10

Urspruch Piano Concerto, Op 9

Emmanuel Despax *pf* **BBC Scottish**

Symphony Orchestra / Eugene Tzigane

Hyperion © CDA68229 (75' • DDD)



The astounding thing about Hyperion's Romantic Piano Concerto series is that, at Vol 77, it's still going strong and that it has, in the main, avoided musical Z-listers.

Bronsart, or Hans August Alexander Bronsart von Schellendorf, to give him his full moniker, wrote his F sharp minor Piano Concerto in 1873, when he was 43, so historically it falls between Brahms's two piano concertos, whose own writing it emulates in terms of its symphonic approach to the genre. But it also betrays moments that are pure Liszt (sample the first movement from 13'15"), which is not surprising given that Bronsart had been a Liszt pupil and premiered his Second Piano Concerto. But this is by no means a work without a personality of its own, as witness its noble opening *tutti* or the

dreamy second subject, introduced by the soloist and interlaced with eloquent woodwind. And it's hard to imagine it being better played than by these forces, Emmanuel Despax displaying a wide range of colours combined with an easy virtuosity. The recording places him fairly well to the front, so he doesn't have to fight through the orchestral textures to make himself heard.

The broad slow movement has an eloquence to it which is very affecting. If it's not melodically the most telling of movements, Bronsart's ear for orchestral effect provides interest and it ends in a mood of utter serenity. The finale is marked *Allegro con fuoco* but that gives little idea of what is in store – a bumptious tarantella that completely undermines the dignity of what has gone before. Even a call to order in the form of a loud fanfare cannot displace the mayhem for long. It requires prodigious playing from soloist and orchestral musicians to make it sound as effortless as here, and that it does is tribute as much to conductor Eugene Tzigane as to Despax.

Though Anton Urspruch's Piano Concerto dates from nine years later, it sounds earlier than Bronsart's, evoking Beethoven (and sometimes Brahms) in pastoral mode. It unfolds on a grand scale but alas does not have the imagination found in Bronsart's concerto. While its gently billowing quality might initially seem attractive, nothing much else happens over the first movement's 24 minutes. Note-writer Jeremy Nicholas sums it up well: 'the first movement rarely departs from a bucolic evocation of Alpine meadows and streams.' But, unlike Beethoven's take on such a scene in his *Pastoral*, there's no danger of storms ahead, and even Despax can't disguise the triumph of infilling over melody. So it's all the more remarkable that this is the second account to have been released in a matter of months, following a fine one from Oliver Triendl and George Fritzsh, their first movement unfolding at a slightly more flowing pace than this new account.

In the *Andante, lento e mesto* we momentarily seem to have dipped into the slow movement of Bach's E major Violin Concerto – if only it had continued in such an inspired vein – but alas this does not linger in the memory. And while the finale is spirited enough (and again highly Beethovenian in some of its piano figuration), it's a case of a triumph of duration over interest; here I marginally prefer the CPO reading for its greater sense of playfulness but neither can

disguise the essential vapidness of Urspruch's creation. The Bronsart, on the other hand, is a more than worthy addition to the series. **Harriet Smith**

Urspruch – comparative version:

Triendl, Nordwestdeutsche Philh, Fritzsch

(6/18) (CPO) CPO555 194-2

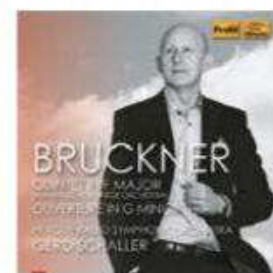
Bruckner

String Quintet (arr Schaller). Overture

Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra /

Gerd Schaller

Profil © PH16036 (57' • DDD)



The scale and richness of Bruckner's String Quintet have encouraged a number

of arrangements for string orchestra over the years, and even a version for chamber ensemble, but this is the first time that the work has received an arrangement for full orchestra. In an essay in the CD booklet, Gerd Schaller acknowledges that the Quintet stands apart from the composer's symphonies but felt inspired by the symphonic essence of the music to create an orchestration for strings, double woodwinds, two trumpets, three trombones and timpani. There are precedents for such a treatment, of course, notably Schoenberg's transcription of Brahms's Piano Quartet No 1 and, more recently, Kenneth Woods's orchestration of the same composer's Piano Quartet No 2. Unlike both Schoenberg and Woods, however, Schaller has retained the original chamber-music character of the work, using the additional forces mainly to add colour and contrast, rather than bringing forth a fundamentally new presentation of the score. In addition to the Quintet's usual four movements, Schaller has also included Bruckner's brief Intermezzo (originally conceived as a replacement for the Quintet's Scherzo) as the fourth movement, making a five-moment piece in total.

There's no doubt that Schaller, who has recorded a full cycle of the symphonies as well as a making a completion of the unfinished finale of the Ninth Symphony, is deeply sympathetic to Bruckner's music. I'm not convinced, however, that the gain from hearing the String Quintet in an orchestrated form outweighs the loss of the original chamber-music conception. Although it could be argued that the closing bars of the first and last movements benefit from the extra weight of the full orchestra, the additional instrumentation elsewhere often sounds superfluous and

unidiomatic. In the case of the *Adagio* in particular, one of Bruckner's most inspired movements, I found myself yearning for the simplicity and radiance of the scoring for string orchestra.

The disc also includes a performance of the Overture in G minor, one of Bruckner's earliest orchestral works. It's an attractive piece that was first recorded by Henry Wood as early as 1937, although it's rather fallen out of favour in recent years. Schaller's interpretation is well played but the versions by Chailly (Decca, 1/90) and especially Skrowaczewski (Oehms Classics) seem to me more effective in communicating the spirit of the piece. The recording of both works, made in Prague Radio Hall, is noticeably drier than the sound of Schaller's earlier recordings of Bruckner's music made in the reverberant Ebrach Abbey.

Christian Hoskins

Finzi

Cello Concerto, Op 40^a. Eclogue, Op 10^b. Grand Fantasia and Toccata, Op 38^b. Nocturne, Op 7

^aPaul Watkins *vc* ^bLouis Lortie *pf*

BBC Symphony Orchestra / Sir Andrew Davis
Chandos ⑤ CHSA5214 (71' • DDD/DSD)



Recordings of Gerald Finzi's imposing Cello Concerto

(premiered at the Cheltenham Festival under John Barbirolli in 1955, the last full year of the composer's life) have never been thick on the ground; if memory serves, this is only the fourth to have come my way. Very impressive it is, too: not only does Paul Watkins evince his customary purity of intonation, unruffled technical address and selfless dedication, he forges a healthy, infectiously tangible rapport with Andrew Davis, who obtains playing of commendable discipline and

eager application from the BBC SO. The opening movement unfolds with a defiant sweep and enviable sureness of purpose (Davis takes the impassioned orchestral exposition at quite a clip). At the same time, these artists are fully alive to this music's nervy, at times angry undertow. The slow movement emerges with an easy flow and unaffected simplicity that contrast strikingly with the more heart-on-sleeve approach taken by Yo-Yo Ma on his pioneering version with Vernon Handley and the RPO (Lyrita, 3/79, 8/07), while the *Allegro giocoso* rondo finale bounds along with delectable swagger and rhythmic snap.

In terms of keen temperament and interpretative spark, the performance put me in mind of Tim Hugh's conspicuously taut account with Howard Griffiths conducting the Royal Northern Sinfonia (Naxos, A/01). Nor do I forget the lasting virtues of Chandos's own rival offering featuring Raphael Wallfisch (10/86), again with Handley, at the helm of the RLPO (which, I see, has been repackaged for a third time coupled with concertos by Bax, Bliss and Moeran).

This newcomer, like the Naxos issue, brings more Finzi: the deeply touching Nocturne (*New Year Music*) – most eloquently done – and his two piano concertante works, the beguilingly serene *Eclogue* and by turns ruminative and scintillating *Grand Fantasia and Toccata*. The French-Canadian virtuoso Louis Lortie seems wholly attuned to the idiom, his playing full of grace and fire, and in the former's closing pages he taps into a vein of deep-rooted mystery as old as time itself; Davis's accompaniments, too, are past praise in their scrupulous attentiveness.

The beautifully balanced sound has the satisfying richness and glow we have come to expect from Chandos. As should be abundantly clear by now, this is something of a treat. **Andrew Achenbach**

Gipps

Symphonies – No 2, Op 30; No 4, Op 61. Knight in Armour, Op 8. Song for Orchestra, Op 33

BBC National Orchestra of Wales / Rumon Gamba
Chandos ⑤ CHAN20078 (69' • DDD)



'That's the best piece of classical music you've played to me', quipped my 10-year-

old daughter on hearing Ruth Gipps's Second Symphony. There is no room here to go into the extent of her musical frame of reference but suffice it to say it is exponentially broader than mine was at twice her age! As these four works show – three receiving premiere outings on disc – Gipps (1921-99) was a distinctive composer with something to say and the technique with which to say it. The single-movement Second Symphony (1945) is a good case in point, its eight sections bearing traces of the conventional four-movement format as well as an integrated set of variations.

The bedrock of Gipps's style was Vaughan Williams, with whom she studied from 1937. Gordon Jacob, whom she would succeed upon his retirement, was her orchestration teacher and these works revel in expert scoring and quintessential Englishness. Yes, there are occasional resonances of Holst and Rawsthorne – even Lilburn (another VW student) in the Second's *Allegro moderato* (track 11) – or Walton in *Knight in Armour* (1940), her musical calling card premiered at 1942's Last Night of the Proms. *Song for Orchestra* (1948) is a miniature highlighting her own instrument, the oboe, but the main event is her superb Fourth Symphony (1972), a contemporary of Tippett's Third, more orthodox in design but still one of the finest British symphonies of the decade.

Fine as Bostock's Munich version was of the Second Symphony, the BBC National

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Guy Rickards

Symphony No 2 – comparative version:

Munich SO, Bostock (10/99[®]) (CLAS) 108 079

Haydn · Schoenberg

'Transfigured Night'

Haydn Cello Concertos – No 1; No 2

Schoenberg Verklärte Nacht, Op 4

Trondheim Soloists / Alisa Weilerstein VC

Pentatone ⑤ PTC5186 717 (73' • DDD/DSD)



Only a cellist who paired Elgar and Elliot Carter on her concerto debut album could

have devised this left-field programme that confronts unsullied Enlightenment optimism with the *fin de siècle* Vienna of Freud and Klimt. Yet, in performances of such freshness, verve and chamber transparency, the concept works. It reminds us, too, that Schoenberg always protested that he was not subverting but merely perpetuating the great Austro-German tradition from Bach and Haydn onwards.

You'd go far to find performances of the Haydn concertos that match Alisa Weilerstein's mix of stylistic sensitivity, verve and spontaneous delight in discovery. Weilerstein is a risk-taker by nature; and the helter-skelter finale of the C major takes impetuosity to the edge. But such is her technical prowess, and the mingled eagerness and skill of the young Trondheim Soloists, that she carries it off, brilliantly. She brings a puckish glee to the lightning passagework in thumb position, yet never short-changes Haydn's brief moments of lyrical eloquence.

Both first movements, too, are unusually mobile, and all the better for it. Here is music-making with a spring in its step and a twinkle in the eye that, you sense, would have delighted Haydn. The opening *Allegro moderato* of the D major too easily outstays its welcome. In Weilerstein's hands it sparkles rather than, as so often, chugs, with an inventive variety of colour and attack and an airy grace in the potentially tedious reams of demisemiquavers. Crucially, too, the orchestral support is always lithe and supple, with a real vitality in the repeated-note bass lines. Both slow movements marry beauty and purity of line (vibrato restrained and subtly varied) with

a confiding inwardness, not least in Weilerstein's rapt *pianissimo* in the closing stages of the D major's *Adagio*. This is my kind of Haydn.

It's also my kind of Schoenberg. Performing his 1899 tone poem with a hyper-responsive group of some 20 players, with Weilerstein now leading the cellos, allows you to combine the advantages of both the original sextet version and Schoenberg's later transcription for string orchestra. There is neurasthenic fervour aplenty in this performance, with all the desperate intensity you could wish for in a work that never holds back on climaxes. But what lingers in the memory is the subtlety and delicacy of so much of the playing (say, in the exquisitely floated violin-cello duet at the moment of the lovers' reconciliation), the clarity of the dense contrapuntal textures and the natural handling of Schoenberg's tricky-to-gauge transitions. From the near inaudibility of the lugubrious opening, teetering on the edge of audibility, the dynamic range, too, is astonishing. If you like your *Verklärte Nacht* lofty and monumental, Karajan and the peerless Berlin Philharmonic strings (DG, 3/75) still lead the field. But for a performance that combines chamber-musical intimacy, transparency of detail and urgent human expressiveness, you won't do better than this.

Richard Wigmore

Hersch

Violin Concerto^a. end stages^b

^a**Patricia Kopatchinskaja** vn

^a**International Contemporary Ensemble / Tito Muñoz; ^bOrpheus Chamber Orchestra**

New Focus ⑤ FCR208 (54' • DDD)

^bRecorded live at Mechanics Hall, Worcester, MA



Michael Hersch's Violin Concerto (2015) immediately hurls us into a

wrenching scene. Trumpet and horn yelp a distressed fanfare as the remaining body of the 13-piece orchestra lurches forwards in convulsive dotted rhythms. A minute or so later the solo violin enters with slashing semitone double-stops, as if struggling to make its raspy voice heard.

This concerto, like much of Hersch's recent work, can be interpreted as a musical battle of life and death – the composer is a cancer survivor and lost a close friend to the disease in 2009 – although I'd say it's closer to unsparing reportage than emotional confessional. There are brief

passages of fragile lyricism and an occasional glimmer of bittersweet nostalgia, but little respite, as even these quickly evaporate or splinter into violent spasm. Listen, for instance, at 2'12" in the second movement, where the solo violin slowly rocks back and forth (in D major/minor), wheezing like an ancient squeezebox; or to the yearning melody that unexpectedly blossoms at 2'56" in the third movement.

Patricia Kopatchinskaja, who commissioned the concerto, aptly describes it as 'brutal and vulnerable at the same time', and her performance conveys that dichotomy with ferocious commitment, aided with equal fearlessness by the International Contemporary Ensemble under Tito Muñoz. The music's intense physicality and bleak atmosphere make for gripping, if harrowing, listening. What draws me to listen again and again is Hersch's ability to communicate desperation that somehow never plummets into despair.

Hersch seems to find inspiration in the work of artists with a similar sensibility; the Violin Concerto is connected to a sculpture by Christopher Cairns, for instance, and has verses by Thomas Hardy as its epigraph. With *end stages* (2016), a set of seven aphoristic miniatures, the stimulus was a series of drawings by artist Kevin Tuttle (handsomely reproduced in the CD booklet). The first four are quite terse and suggest noirish cinematic fragments. Starting with the fifth, however, the emotions become more richly articulated – or, as Aaron Grad puts it in his perceptive booklet notes, the pieces 'move progressively inward, rather than forward'. Ideally, I think the latter movements would benefit from a rawer sound than the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra give us here, but the performance's cumulative power is considerable nonetheless.

Andrew Farach-Colton

Holst · Elgar

Elgar Pomp and Circumstance March, Op 39

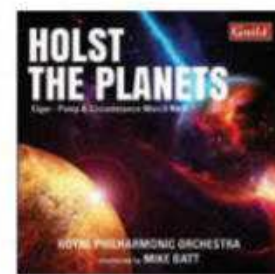
No 1 **Holst** The Planets, Op 32^a

^a**Women's Voices of the John McCarthy Chorus;**

Royal Philharmonic Orchestra / Mike Batt

Guild ⑤ GMCD7814 (59' • DDD)

Recorded 1993



Why, you may rightly ask, has it taken fully 25 years for this set of Holst's *The Planets* to see the light of day? Well, there can be few grumbles with Simon Rhodes's full-blooded, intrepidly wide-ranging sound

(emanating from Watford Town Hall), but I'm a good deal less persuaded about the merits and durability of the actual performance. Certainly, by the side of Vernon Handley's magnificent interpretation with the same orchestra set down a just a few weeks later in October 1993 for 'The Royal Philharmonic Collection' on Tring International (7/94), Mike Batt's reading emerges as a merely competent, somewhat flabby affair, by no means always devoid of a whiff of routine. In 'Mars' I quickly found myself craving the canny terracing of dynamics and sense of elemental power in reserve that make the Handley such a gripping experience. 'Venus' has plenty of lusciousness but is just a little wanting in concentration and silken poise, while 'Jupiter' is too heavy on its pins for my own tastes. Most damagingly, towards the end of 'Neptune' there are chronic problems of pitch between the women's choir and orchestra, further exacerbated by Batt's laboured tempo.

All in all, then, not a *Planets* to store away for future reference; better to stick with Boult, Sargent, Steinberg, Previn, Dutoit, Mackerras, Handley, Elder, Gardner ... the list goes on and on. There's a fill-up in the shape of Elgar's D major *Pomp and Circumstance* March.

Batt generates lots of bluster but rather less in the way of freshness of discovery, twinkling affection or songful dignity; both Andrew Davis (Chandos, 7/12) and Mark Elder (Hallé, 11/15) demonstrate exactly how it should be done.


Andrew Achenbach

M Lindberg

Violin Concerto No 2^a. *Tempus fugit*

^aFrank Peter Zimmermann *violin*

Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra / Hannu Lintu

Online (F)  ODE1308-5 (58' • DDD/DSD)



Magnus Lindberg wrote his Violin Concerto No 2 (2015) for Frank Peter

Zimmermann. Whether or not the German's thick-set tone and pre-eminence in Szymanowski influenced the Finnish composer, the work is one of Lindberg's most tonal and luscious to date. However tightly woven, this is a Romantic concerto in disguise, where Lindberg's First was more Classical. The theme aired towards the end of the first movement that comes to fruition in the central one (there are no movement breaks) is short, emotive and could be by Korngold; the music's

consistent goal-orientation, its charged energy field sitting between extreme polarities, is all Lindberg's own and recognisably so. Notable features include the soloist's frantic, crude sawing away at the open strings, a muster point to which he returns as if to recharge and refocus, and the work's raised-eyebrow, backdoor ending. Zimmermann gives the piece his considerable all, though there's the occasional moment of ambiguity right at the top of his register.

Tempus fugit (2016-17) is more of a riddle. This is Lindberg looking back on himself: revisiting, courtesy of a long period of research, harmonic techniques he explored in the late '80s. It's odd hearing *echt* 'Lindberg' gestures copied by Lindberg himself, like a dancer trying to retrace his own steps by studying a grainy old VHS. The music is still built from the bottom up but the five-part piece never really soars, and the devolution into chamber-like textures feels mannered, robbing the music of that essential Lindberg quality: the feeling of a mammoth single structure heaving its way along. It is characteristically wise of Lindberg to have taken stock in *Tempus fugit* but the process's ripest fruits may be still to come.

Andrew Mellor

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Mendelssohn

Violin Concerto, Op 64^a. Octet, Op 20^b

Chouchane Siranossian, ^b**Balázs Bozzai**, ^b**Nicolas Mazzoleni** *vns* ^b**Bernadette Verhagen**, ^b**Katya Polin** *vas* ^b**Davit Melkonyan**, ^b**Astrig Siranossian** *vcs*
^a**Anima Eterna, Bruges / Jakob Lehmann** ^b*vn*
Alpha Ⓢ ALPHA410 (60' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Concertgebouw, Bruges,
^aNovember 24, 2016; ^bNovember 27 & 28, 2017



Chouchane Siranossian and Anima Eterna present not the

familiar versions of these two evergreen masterpieces but instead go back to the original versions. That means a solo line in the concerto with occasional departures from the one we know and some rather radical (and wonderful) extra music in the Octet, most ear-catchingly in the first movement. Matters of 19th-century performance practice come into play too, with straighter tone – vibrato used as shading rather than colour – and, most noticeably, a greater reliance on portamento.

Isabelle Faust took a similar approach in her recording of the concerto and Siranossian's compares well with that earlier disc. One may even prefer the sound of the new version: slightly more closely miked with a keener focus on the violin which, in Faust's case, sounded a touch more spindly than here. The orchestra, too, sound excellent in this live performance – so much so that, in the best way possible, you realise that you have barely noticed them.

Siranossian takes the lead in the magnificent Octet of Mendelssohn's teenage years, possibly to the extent of being rather more than *primus inter pares*, her individual voice and style clearly in the spotlight as compared with her chamber companions. The Eroica Quartet and friends took on this early version of the Octet to launch the Resonus label in 2011 in download-only format, so it is a worthwhile exercise making Octet Mk I available on disc.

Does the portamento become something of an issue? On first hearing, it may make one a little seasick but the ear soon adjusts, so closely woven is the style into the character of the music and this particular player. All the same, there's a reason we don't (usually) do it this way any more. Gone, for example, is the cut-crystal accuracy of the concerto's finale, in favour of a rather more 'skaty' approach to its filigree. But the music's sheer élan is barely

compromised, making this a vividly enjoyable presentation.

David Threasher

Violin Concerto – selected comparison:

Faust, Freiburg Baroque Orch, Heras-Casado
(A/17) (HARM) HMM90 2325

Octet – selected comparison:

Eroica Qt et al (6/11) (RESO) ➔ RES10101

Mozart

Symphonies – No 40, K550^a;

No 41, 'Jupiter', K551^b

Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra / Herbert Blomstedt

BR-Klassik Ⓢ 900164 (73' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Herkulesaal, Munich,

^aJanuary 30 & February 1, 2013;

^bDecember 21 & 22, 2017



Mozart's late symphonic music is nowadays so much the province – almost

the property – of the period-instrument brigade that a recording by a traditional 'big' orchestra might seem somewhat old-fashioned. Don't be fooled. These performances by the warm-toned Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra with the octo- and nonagenarian conductor Herbert Blomstedt eschew all notions of plushness for a drive and determination that one might more readily associate with younger, slimmer, more supposedly 'informed' groups.

There's an undertow of danger to the outer movements of the G minor (K550) that is easily missed if one seeks in them only Schumann's 'Grecian lightness and grace'. The *Jupiter* retains its suavity and classical balance without descending for a second into complacency. Tempos remain keen, with even minuets offering something of a kick. Moreover, there is a gratifyingly generous provision of repeats, not only in sonata second halves but also in minuet returns. Woodwind come into their own thanks to finely judged balances and sympathetic engineering, not only in solo moments but also in ensemble, whistling like a whirlwind in their unison commentaries on the strenuous *Sturm und Drang* of the G minor.

Both performances have about them a most satisfying sense of rightness. Nothing sticks out or strikes one as odd but neither is there any sense of routine, with the orchestra audibly on its toes throughout. A recent recording this one perhaps most closely resembles, then, is the Scottish Chamber Orchestra with Mackerras: similarly considered from a vantage point

of many years' experience, not to mention finely played – albeit in studio conditions and presumably with slightly smaller forces – but without any hint of quirkiness or imposed 'individuality' for its own sake. These two symphonies are recorded so often (and the coupling is virtually set in stone) but this is nevertheless a high-class and eminently pleasing addition to their discography. **David Threasher**

Selected comparison – coupled as above:

SCO, Mackerras (4/08) (LINN) CKD308

Rachmaninov • Sibelius

Rachmaninov Piano Concerto No 3, Op 30^a

Sibelius Symphony No 2, Op 43

^a**Gerard Aimontche** *pf*

Chineke! Orchestra / Roderick Cox

Signum Ⓢ ② SIGCD548 (85' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Royal Festival Hall, London,
July 16, 2017

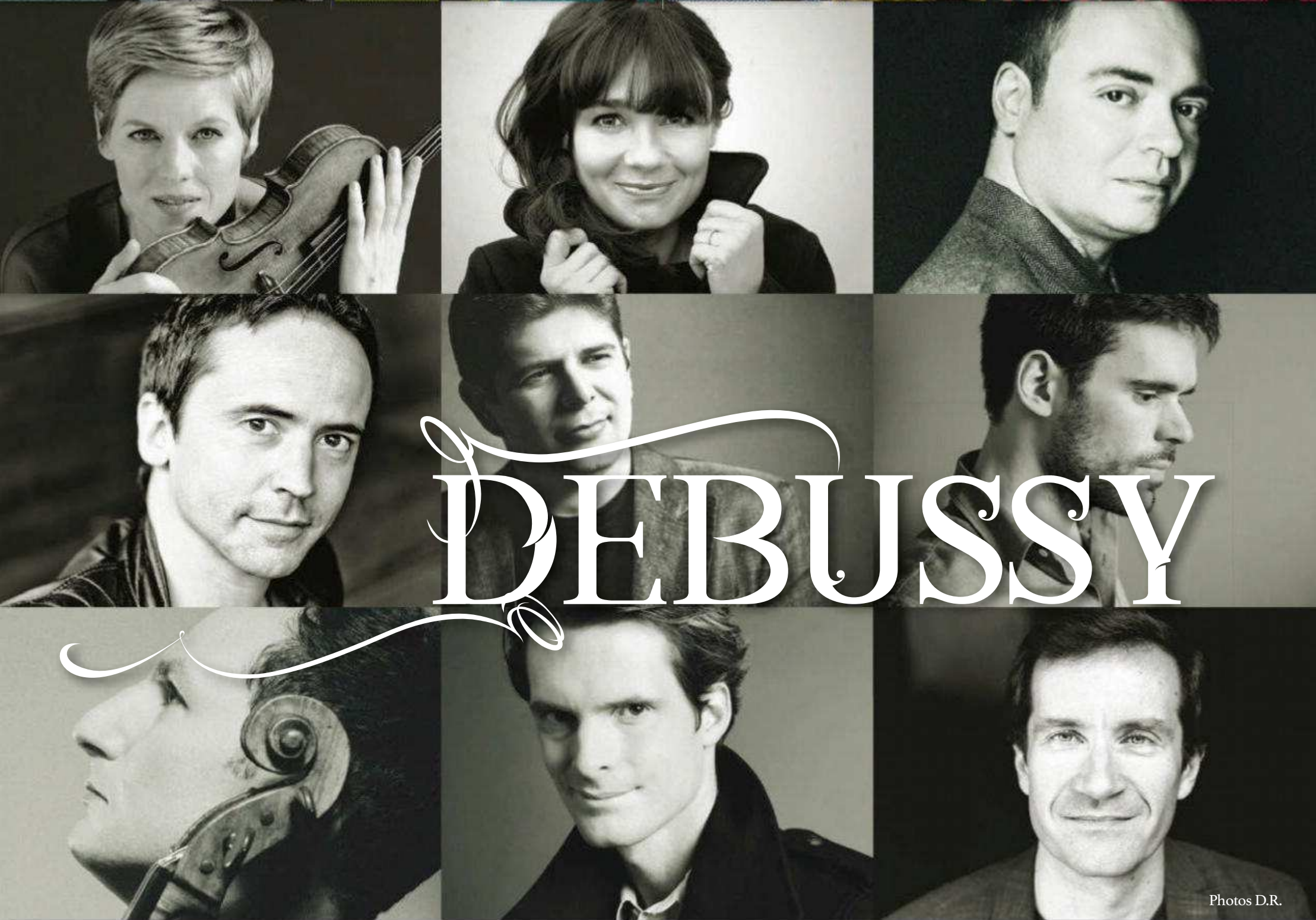


In an ideal world there should be no need for a special orchestra that selects

musicians on the basis of colour and race, any more than for one that prescribes gender or sexuality. But perhaps such a universe is still as utopian as John Lennon's 'Imagine'. Meanwhile, for founder Chi-chi Nwanoku the Chineke! project is all about 'redressing balance and changing perceptions', and a review is not the place to editorialise.

Now in their third year, Chineke! Foundation and Orchestra are entering a phase where they deserve to be scrutinised according to their actual ability and achievements, not just for their novelty and agendas. They are certainly on their way to showing that they can be considered on a par with any non-Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) orchestra. Since their previous recording (also for Signum and also including Sibelius – 9/17) they have clearly improved greatly on their ensemble playing and overall presence. And they still radiate dedication and energy. The hurdle to cross now is that there are times when their absorption with the technicalities of ensemble looms larger than the joy of actual music-making.

This is the case, for example, with the third movement of the Sibelius, where their supersonic tempo is all well and good but the expressive imperative is hard to detect. (Don't be misled by the booklet stating that the movement lasts over 12 minutes; that's just a mistake in the track division, which has been placed in the middle of the finale.) Otherwise Roderick Cox's tempos fall



Photos D.R.

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Antoine Tamestit
Xavier de Maistre
Nikolai Lugansky



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somewhere between Robert Kajanus's 1930 reference recording (Koch Legacy) and that of Barbirolli (EMI – another reference, for its passionate humanism). But, overall, the emotional picture is still somewhat monochrome.

Similarly with Rachmaninov. Gerard Aimontche's undoubted virtuoso command and the orchestra's commendable responsiveness fall short when it comes to dramatic tension, dreaminess and generosity, qualities that are found in super-abundance from Lazar Berman with Abbado (Sony, 6/77), among others.

To bring in another drastic comparison, the Chineke! Orchestra has yet to find the special musical quality to go with its back story, in the way that the Simón Bolívar Orchestra and Dudamel so spectacularly did. Maybe when it shifts its attention to BME composers, as promised, there will be fewer invidious comparisons and more chance for their light to shine. **Michelle Assay**

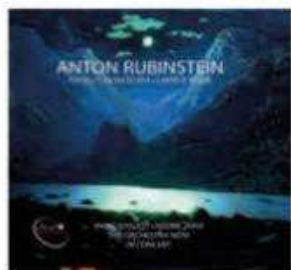
Rubinstein

Piano Concerto No 4, Op 70.

Caprice russe, Op 102

Anna Shelest *pf* **The Orchestra Now / Neeme Järvi**
Sorel © SCCD013 (51' • DDD)

Recorded live at Jazz at Lincoln Center's
Rose Theater, New York, October 15, 2017



A one-time concert staple, Anton Rubinstein's Fourth Piano Concerto

virtually disappeared from the repertoire in the West by the mid-20th century. While the music isn't likely to regain immense popularity, its fortunes have nevertheless been revived through a number of modern-day recordings. The latest contender was recorded live in New York, with the pianist Anna Shelest and Neeme Järvi leading Leon Botstein's The Orchestra Now. The conductor launches into the first-movement introduction at a faster than usual clip, while Shelest sails through her introductory cadenza with bracing confidence and not a single splinter or vagary in those massive chords. Her forward-moving phrasing and flexibility are exactly what this burly music demands, even though her passages with descending double notes lack Marc-André Hamelin's supple evenness. The pianist's tone notably opens up in the cadenza, where even a home listener gets a sense of how her melodic projection extends out towards the venue's proverbial peanut gallery.

If anything, the tumultuous finale showcases Shelest's power and agility

operating at more inspired capacity, tossing out runs, leaps and octave surges to effortless effect. Järvi and his musicians clearly enjoy the music's rapid-fire interplay between soloist and ensemble. Yet despite strong orchestral support and lovingly phrased woodwind-playing, the central *Andante* falls slightly flat. Here is where the ability to shape long *cantabile* lines and achieve a genuine singing legato is crucial, and Shelest frankly does not sustain the lyrical sections with the transparency, textural variety and colour that one hears from the veteran Shura Cherkassky.

A colleague characterised the *Caprice russe* as 'Rubinstein wanting to be Saint-Saëns'. And why not? After all, the composers were friends and colleagues, and what's wrong with interweaving three memorable themes into a fantasy full of pianistic glitter, even if much of it rambles with padding? Much as I appreciate the full-bodied eloquence of Joseph Banowetz's Marco Polo recording, Shelest proves more nuanced and incisive all round. Listen to the bravura sweep of her long cadenza leading into her heel-kicking treatment of the Scherzando, and the orchestra's corresponding élan; a zestier option compared to the heavier-gaited Centaur version with pianist Grigorios Zamparas. If you want a darker, more serious *Caprice russe*, stick with Banowetz, but the more extroverted Shelest/Järvi seems more in keeping with the work's blatant flashiness. However, Hamelin's Rubinstein Fourth remains the current sonic and interpretative point of reference, seconded by the steely brilliance of the Raekallio/Grin release from Ondine. **Jed Distler**

Piano Concerto No 4 – selected comparisons:

Raekallio, Tampere PO, Grin (2/95) (ONDI) ODE818-2

Cherkassky, RPO, Ashkenazy (3/96) (DECC) 448 063-2DH

Hamelin, BBC Scottish SO, Stern

(10/05) (HYPE) CDA67508

Caprice russe – selected comparisons:

Banowetz, Czecho-Slovak St SO, Stankovsky

(MARC) 8 223382

Zamparas, Martinů PO, Mitchell (CENT) CRC3032

R Strauss

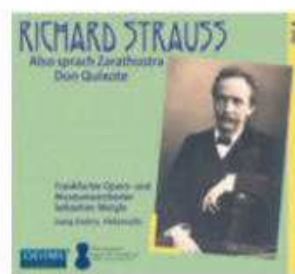
Also sprach Zarathustra, Op 30.

Don Quixote, Op 35^a

^a**Isang Enders** *vc* **Thomas Rössel** *va* **Frankfurt Museum and Opera Orchestra / Sebastian Weigle**
Oehms © OC893 (78' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Alte Oper, Frankfurt,

March 18 & 19, 2018



Sebastian Weigle and his Frankfurt orchestra here reach the sixth

volume of their survey of Strauss orchestral works. In doing so, they also reach two of the composer's greatest works in the genre that he made his own, the tone poem. It makes for a well-filled programme that matches the generosity and warmth that increasingly defines the series – matched by Oehms's rounded and pleasing engineering.

This means admittedly that in *Also sprach Zarathustra* one shouldn't expect the sort of widescreen extravagance of some recordings; nor is the work treated as a showpiece. Weigle is a patient Straussian, his eye always on the bigger prize of symphonic coherence. You'll hear more thrilling opening sunrises elsewhere, as well as more biting and incisive violins and general virtuosity. Weigle also arguably lets the tension flag a little at times – such as at fig 8, a minute or so into 'Das Grablied' (track 5). But few performances build up the textures of 'Von den Hinterweltlern' with such eloquence and patience, while Weigle's gently lilting way with the 'Tanzlied' grows to the sort of climaxes – with cultivated, rounded horns soaring aloft – that really warm the cockles. The final minutes of 'Nachtwandlerlied', with fine work from the solo strings in particular, are beautifully done.

The performance of *Don Quixote* is, if anything, even finer. It's helped by supremely expressive and – ultimately – moving cello-playing from the young Frankfurt-born cellist Isang Enders. Both he and viola player Thomas Rössel (the orchestra's principal) blend beautifully into the orchestral picture, stepping out with plenty of character for the longer solo passages.

Rössel is expressive and garrulous. His playing is especially delicious early on in the chatty Variation 3, which grows irresistibly in its lyricism. Here as elsewhere Enders plays superbly, singing out his melodies while being vividly alive to the descriptive writing – I particularly like the way he wrings out each last drop from his sodden pizzicatos at the close of Var 8. The orchestral solos are very fine, too, and Weigle is expert, as before, in weaving it all into a compelling whole, while delivering a death scene that is full of feeling and pathos.

Bigger Straussian thrills are to be found elsewhere, as are bigger characters embodying *Don Quixote*, but this is another highly persuasive release in a series built on the firmest musical foundations. **Hugo Shirley**

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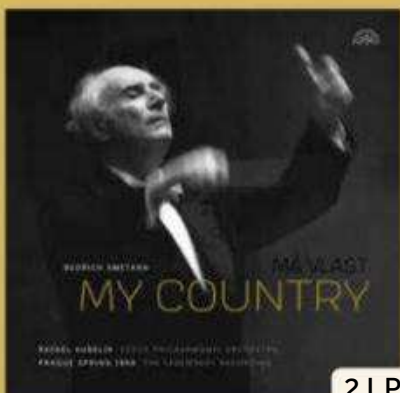


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Consistent intensity: Anne Akiko Meyers pays tribute to various composers with whom her career has been associated, from Pärt to Corigliano – see review on page 49

Tinoco

The Blue Voice of the Water^a. Cello Concerto^b. Frisland^c. Before Spring: A Tribute to 'The Rite'^d
^bFilipe Quaresma *vc* ^aGulbenkian Orchestra / Susanna Mälkki; ^dPorto Casa da Música Symphony Orchestra / Martin André; ^bPortuguese Symphony Orchestra / Pedro Neves; ^cSeattle Symphony Orchestra / Ludovic Morlot
 Odradek © ODRCD365 (61' • DDD)
 Recorded live at ^cBenaroya Hall, Seattle, June 6, 2014; ^aGulbenkian Auditorium, Lisbon, February 25 & 26, 2016; ^bCentro Cultural de Belém, Lisbon, February 19, 2017; ^dSala Suggia, Casa da Música, Porto, May 13, 2017



is. In expanding upon his guiding metaphor for this collection of recent orchestral music, the Portuguese composer Luís Tinoco notes the orchestra's allowance for field depth: the way in which, as in the sea, a surface instrumental gesture can lead to fathoms-deep expansion.

The title composition, *The Blue Voice of the Water*, gives ample display of this. A frequently used technique for exploring

depth is the cross-fading of instrumental sounds. The work's opening section deftly melds the sounds of piano cluster, clarinet, cymbal and strings; the resultant orchestral aggregate recalls Ligeti without the atonal harshness and gives the impression of light glimpsed from far underwater. Indeed, such is the score's restraint and limned clarity (matched by the Gulbenkian Orchestra's sensitive performance) that at times one almost feels one is listening to a chamber orchestra. Lucid engineering allows us to appreciate the colouristic detail in full.

Tinoco uses an extended tonality without recourse to over-familiar tropes or empty bombast. The Cello Concerto opens with a falling minor third figure, distorted, as in water's ripples, by layered *pianissimo* string chords. The cello, when it enters, lyrically expands upon this material. Midway through the movement, a descending scalar theme enters in the winds, gradually spreading outwards to take over the musical activity. A subsequent shivering tremolo motif provides contrast, before in the final movement eventually taking over. The meditative conclusion features Gamelan gongs. Filipe Quaresma shines in particular in the second movement's opening solo.

Of the other two works here, *Frisland* (dedicated to the jazz guitarist Bill Frisell)

pursues a triadic chaconne-like figure in extended tonality; trumpet adds jazzy effects and the layering of sound strata achieves a dreamlike, monumental effect. *Before Spring: A Tribute to 'The Rite'*, meanwhile, homes in on small moments in Stravinsky's score, expanding them into new vistas in Tinoco's characteristic style.

Liam Cagney

Vaughan Williams

A Sea Symphony (Symphony No 1)^a.

Darest thou now, O soul

^aElizabeth Llewellyn *sop* ^aMarcus Farnsworth *bar*
 BBC Symphony Chorus and Orchestra / Martyn Brabbins

Hyperion © CDA68245 (71' • DDD • T)



Martyn Brabbins follows up his outstandingly lucid account of Vaughan Williams's *A London Symphony* in its first published edition of 1920 (11/17) with this no less distinguished traversal of *A Sea Symphony*. His is a painstakingly prepared and intelligently paced conception, combining a perceptive awareness of the grander scheme (climaxes are built and

GRAMOPHONE *Focus*

SOME SCINTILLATING SAINT-SAËNS

Jeremy Nicholas is in his element with two recordings of Saint-Saëns's effervescent piano concertos, from two exciting and very different pianists



Refinement and Gallic exuberance: Bertrand Chamayou excels in Saint-Saëns's concertos and rarely heard solo pieces

Saint-Saëns

Piano Concertos – No 1, Op 17;

No 2, Op 22; No 4, Op 44

Louis Lortie *pf*

BBC Philharmonic Orchestra / Edward Gardner

Chandos © CHAN20031 (71' • DDD)

Saint-Saëns

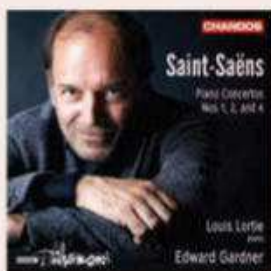
Piano Concertos^a – No 2, Op 22; No 5, 'Egyptian', Op 103. Allegro appassionato, Op 70. Mazurka No 3, Op 66. Valse nonchalante, Op 110. Six Études, Op 52 – No 2, pour l'indépendance des doigts; No 6, En forme de valse. Six Études, Op 111 – No 1, Tierces majeures et mineures; No 4, Les cloches de Las Palmas

Bertrand Chamayou *pf*

^a**French National Orchestra / Emmanuel Krivine**

Erato © 9029 56342-6; © 9029 56342-2

(78' • DDD)



It is perhaps unfortunate that I began my listening with the second work on Louis Lortie's disc, the G minor Concerto (No 2), which opens with a passage for solo piano. I found the tone and placement of the soloist not immediately alluring, in fact slightly disconcerting. The ears had to adjust – unusual for a Chandos concerto recording – which they soon did, with the realisation that Louis Lortie had decided throughout to dominate or at least match his conductor's forthright accompaniment. This is not the most elegant recording of Saint-Saëns's Second Concerto but it is bold and fiery, with the frisson of a live performance.

Small, unimportant things draw attention to themselves, like the hard mallets used by the timp player in the Scherzo. Likewise, the opening of the exuberant and underrated First Concerto. This has two horns playing *mp* the triplet figure that provides the first subject answered by two (chromatic) horns playing the same phrase *pp* and *sons bouchés* (ie stopped). Usually, the

players achieve this echo effect sitting next to each other; Gardner (and, surprisingly, Oramo – Hyperion, 11/01) put the second pair backstage. I don't say it is unsuccessful, just unnecessary. The performance of the concerto fizzles with testosterone (offset by an enchanting account of the reflective slow movement) and would be a highly recommendable front runner were it not for the final pages, where the orchestra obliterates the brilliant flights of the soloist. To hear what Saint-Saëns wrote (and in all the

movements of all five of his concertos), turn to Jean-Marie Darré and Louis Forestier, though of course in far less opulent late-1950s mono sound.

No such niggles obtain in the Fourth Concerto, which goes splendidly throughout in all departments. In fact, the only thing missing is one ingredient common to both Darré/Forestier and Cortot/Munch (1935, surely one of the great concerto recordings), and that is charm. A final complaint: why does the conductor get bigger billing than the soloist on the Chandos CD cover? Obviously this is a collaborative venture but ultimately it is the pianist who is the star in a piano concerto recording and who should get at least equal billing.

The G minor Concerto opens Bertrand Chamayou's disc. Good as the Lortie/Gardner account is, it simply does not compare in detail, refinement or sheer Gallic exuberance. In fact, I would go as far as placing Chamayou and Krivine at or near the top of the myriad recordings currently available. Let me count the ways. A small detail –

but one which Saint-Saëns took the trouble to carefully notate – is in the opening (unbarred) piano solo. Amid the 32nd-note flurries is a series of left hand *tenutos*, hardly noticed by Lortie but wittily pointed by Chamayou, whose whole approach is less fussy and coloured by a deliciously lucid tone. His *pianissimo-leggiero* and *jeu perlé* playing are quite masterly, shown at his best in the Scherzo (with a more discreet and collegial timpanist) in which the second subject is far removed from Lortie's galumphing farmer and more a light-footed dancing master. The finale zips along with exemplary clarity – listen to the precision of those trills! – and ends in spine-tingling exultation.

The *Egyptian Concerto* (No 5) is hardly less successful. Stephen Hough is perhaps marginally more atmospheric in the slow movement and the greater tone painter of the two, but Chamayou never loses sight of the fact that this is a virtuoso piano concerto. One can well believe that Saint-Saëns found his inspiration for the opening measures of the finale in the pounding of the paddle steamer's wheels as it travelled up the Nile. The final octave peroration played *pianissimo* makes for a thrilling conclusion.

Chamayou follows the two concertos with seven well-chosen solos, among them the *Étude en forme de valse*. I can safely say that this is the most scintillating account I have heard other than Alfred Cortot's celebrated 1931 recording – it's that good – and shows a clean pair of heels to the cautious Piers Lane on Hyperion's set of all Saint-Saëns's études. Indeed, Chamayou is the more alive of the two in the three other études he plays, one of which is the rarely heard *Les cloches de Las Palmas* (No 4 of the *Six Études*, Op 111). Listen at the 1'57" mark: have church bells calling the faithful to prayer ever been more uncannily imitated on the piano by any composer? Talking of whom, the Mazurka No 3 and *Valse nonchalante*, Op 110, included here, must have been particular favourites of his as he himself made a piano roll of the former in 1915 and a shellac recording of the latter in 1904. It is with this that Chamayou (albeit far more nonchalantly than Saint-Saëns) concludes this most desirable disc. **G**

resolved with unerring authority), exemplary attention to detail and mastery of texture (I don't think I've ever heard the dusky outer portions of the slow movement sound more magically luminous). Throughout, the BBC Symphony Chorus and Orchestra respond with thrilling accomplishment and unflagging enthusiasm, the Scherzo (precisely *Allegro brillante* as marked) especially exhilarating in its fiery thrust and giddy coordination.

Both Elizabeth Llewellyn and Marcus Farnsworth sing with attractively fresh timbre and impeccable enunciation, their memorably unforced contribution reminding me somewhat of Sheila Armstrong and John Carol Case on Adrian Boult's stereo recording (EMI/Warner, 12/68); listen from 14'37" in the finale ('O soul thou pleasest me, I thee') to hear them at their intimate best – and how skilfully Brabbins negotiates the magnificent pages which follow (that towering *tutti* at 'Sail forth – steer for the deep waters only' will have you gasping in its exultant impact). Superbly controlled, too, are the work's awestruck closing measures to cap a majestic interpretation that I can unhesitatingly place in the front rank alongside the 1953 Boult (7/94), Handley (2/89), Haitink (1/90) and Elder (Hallé, A/15).

We get an intriguing bonus in the shape of *Darest thou now, O soul*, just three minutes in duration and another setting of words from Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* for unison chorus and string orchestra dating from 1925. The text will be familiar to many from *Toward the Unknown Region* (which gave the composer one of his earliest successes at the 1907 Leeds Festival), and the present arrangement (attributed to 'WH' on the manuscript) may conceivably be the work of his good friend William Henry Hadow (1859-1937), for whose 1931 book *English Music* Vaughan Williams penned an introduction.

Resplendently engineered by Simon Eadon at Blackheath Concert Halls, this is, quite simply, a release not to be missed – and fingers crossed for the remaining seven RVW symphonies from Brabbins and Hyperion. **Andrew Achenbach**

'Mirror in Mirror'

Ciupiński Edo Lullaby^a. Wreck of the Umbria^a

Corigliano Lullaby for Natalie^b **Glass**

Metamorphosis II^b **Lauridsen** *O magnum*

mysterium^c **Pärt** *Fratres*^b. *Spiegel im Spiegel*^b

Ravel *Tzigane*^d

Anne Akiko Meyers *vn*^b **Akira Eguchi** *pf*

^a**Elizabeth Pridgen** *kybd* ^{ad}**Jakub Ciupiński** *elecs*

^c**Philharmonic Orchestra** / **Kristjan Järvi**

Avie © AV2386 (64' • DDD)



You can rely on Anne Akiko Meyers to deliver something more than a violin

concerto with fill-ups, as this latest concept album proves. Eight works, six composers, among whom the odd one out in every respect is Maurice Ravel: the only figure who hasn't been directly involved in Meyers's career. Right in the middle of a zenned-out album, sitting between Pärt's *Spiegel im Spiegel* and a lullaby by John Corigliano, Ravel's gypsy romp *Tzigane* constitutes an almighty bump in the road.

Meyers has recorded the piece before but here we have a version featuring Jakub Ciupiński's digital re-creation of the *luthéal*, the piano add-on Ravel indicated might be used. That sounds convincing and fascinating, but Meyers's own gypsy fire doesn't have the abandon of some of her recent rivals, Patricia Kopatchinskaja included (Alpha, 2/18).

I would have ditched *Tzigane* altogether, because Meyers's stern, highly controlled but variously coloured sound meets every other piece here very well indeed. Her rapid arpeggio figurations across the four strings of the 1741 ex-Vieuxtemps Guarneri del Gesù are firm and consistent, her tone strong without being sweet or glossy. It works a treat in Glass's *Metamorphosis II* (the arrangement is by Michael Riesman) and for the ritornellos in Pärt's *Fratres*. Meyers adopts a fixed colour for each phase of the latter, each holding you in its gaze. From the figurations at 6'00" she strikes every note bang in its centre point. Each bow stroke has the same, consistent level of intensity.

That said, Corigliano's *Lullaby*, written for Meyer's baby daughter, might have benefited from less contact and a more innocent sound. It's a pretty piece but the two original scores by Ciupiński are more worthy successors to Pärt's, each disciplined and fertile. Initially, Lauridsen's own concertante arrangement of *O magnum mysterium* reveals how much the piece owes to the open-prairie sound of Copland and others, but the cymbal-strewn anti-crescendos are straight out of the Hollywood cheesemonger's toolkit and the piece becomes something more sickly than a 'quiet song of profound inner joy' (the composer's description of the original motet). Maybe that's OK given the market. And, frankly, I struggle more with the shock of *Tzigane*.

Andrew Mellor

Tchaikovsky's Swan Lake

Vladimir Jurowski tells Sarah Kirkup why we should honour the composer's original intentions

Vladimir Jurowski has just stepped off a plane and is, by his own admission, 'quite tired'. But as we ensconce ourselves in an office at the Royal Opera House and start immersing ourselves in the multiples scores of *Swan Lake* that have been provided for us, he becomes increasingly animated. This music means a great deal to the Russian conductor: he recalls, as a child, seeing his father Mikhail conducting Burmeister's 1953 version at the Stanislavsky Theatre (he also remembers growing up listening to the Soviet recordings by Rozhdestvensky and Svetlanov). But in the late '80s, Jurowski's view of the ballet changed forever when he saw it at Berlin's Komische Oper in a re-choreographed version by Tom Schilling that revisited the original 1877 score. 'Since then, I've been corrupted by the idea that this is the only way to perform *Swan Lake*,' Jurowski says. Thus, it is to this original score that he has returned for his new Pentatone recording with the State Academic Symphony Orchestra of Russia 'Evgeny Svetlanov'.

We know from one of Tchaikovsky's letters that by August 1875 he had started working on the music, while a note in the autograph score reveals that he completed it in April 1876. And we know that the ballet was premiered in Moscow on February 20, 1877, with choreography by Julius Reisinger. Even today, the premiere is recalled as being 'disastrous', although in fact the ballet ran for 41 performances across three productions in six years (and Tchaikovsky fared better than Reisinger, for whom *Swan Lake* was the final nail in the Czech choreographer's coffin). But it was the St Petersburg revival of 1895 (completed after Tchaikovsky's death), with choreography by Petipa and Ivanov, that prevailed. It didn't seem to matter that, to reflect a new libretto by Modeste Tchaikovsky, the score had been substantially revised (a process instigated by Petipa and implemented by his music director, the composer Riccardo Drigo): repeats were jettisoned; three piano pieces from his Op 72, orchestrated by Drigo, were added; and whole numbers were cut or repositioned. 'Chopping up the order is nonsense,' says Jurowski. 'The original score reveals this symphonic form of development where, through a sequence of keys, everything is connected. The 1895 version destroyed that.'

In front of us, we have the 1877 and 1895 versions (edited by Jurgenson) and the Simpson-edited Kalmus version adapted for Liam Scarlett's recent Royal Ballet production. There's also a copy of the autograph score bearing Tchaikovsky's handwritten notes (or 'script' – Jurowski's term) in French describing the action. But Jurowski isn't happy. Where's the Russian Dance?

This virtuoso piece for violin and orchestra was composed by Tchaikovsky at the behest of Reisinger, after the score had already been completed. The composer promptly obliged, and it was performed by Pelagia Karpakova (who danced Odette) at the premiere. 'Our intention was to record the 1877 version but with the addition of this number,' says Jurowski. 'If you look here' – he finds the Index pages to both the 1877 and 1895 scores – 'you'll see an asterisk with a page number for a supplementary number.' Taking each score in turn, we locate the page in question – but the Russian Dance isn't there. As for the Kalmus version, there's no mention of a supplementary



Swan Lake was recorded live in concert, but additional takes took another week

number at all. Jurowski eventually tracks down online an equivalent version to the edition he used (the Soviet 1977 Muzyka edition, in consultation with the original Jurgenson) and discovers what he's looking for. 'Here it is!' he exclaims. 'And it's interpolated where it *should* be – in Act 3, after the Danse hongroise Czárdás and before the Danse espagnole.'

That Jurowski should want to follow a composer's intentions is understandable. But to state, as he does in the CD booklet-note, that 'it's almost impossible to appreciate the music of the original unless you perform it in a concert where there's no need to adapt to the dance' is, to any balletomane, alarming. When I tentatively point this out to him, though, he argues his point convincingly. 'With the greatest respect to those who were inventing the original choreography, they simply weren't musical enough. And I'm yet to see a properly radical rethinking of *Swan Lake* in the theatre which goes along with this [he raps the autograph score with his knuckle].'

Can he give me some examples of where the music is hampered by the dance? He turns to the famous Dance of the Cygnets in Act 2, No 13 – IV. 'Look at this,' he says. 'With the key – F sharp minor – and the style of writing, the first thing that comes to mind is Schubert's *Moment musicale* No 3 [he hums the theme briskly – the similarity is undeniable]. 'But that's not the speed you hear it performed, even though it's marked *Allegro moderato* – because it's impossible to dance it at that speed. Quite simply, the choreographer got it wrong.'

The conductor turns to the Pas de deux – IV, Coda in Act 1, usually performed these days in Act 3 and the vehicle for Odile's famed 32 *fouetté* turns. There are no indications that the music should slow down then accelerate prior to the repeat of the opening theme, yet that has become the tradition. But, Jurowski says, 'if it's in one tempo, as written, you appreciate the full sweep of this vile energy that pervades the ballet.'

The undercurrent of evil (the plot ultimately sees Rothbart tricking the Prince into betraying Odette, consigning her to death) is fundamental to Jurowski's reading of the score, as are the psychological motives of the characters. Take Odette, he says. He points to Act 2, No 13: Danse des cygnes – V, and to


the love duet between violin and cello. But what's this? The gently unfolding final bars in 6/8 that we're used to hearing as a trembling Odette finally yields to Prince Siegfried were not, it seems, Tchaikovsky's preferred ending. An alternative concluding passage – comprising jaunty, staccato rhythms in 2/4 – appears first, which has then been struck through. 'He was following the same principle as Verdi,' Jurowski says. 'After a lyrical arioso you have to have a cabaletta. But the ballet world would have said, "You can't finish a *pas d'action* like that".' It goes without saying that Jurowski has recorded the original ending – not least because it takes us deeper into Odette's emotional world. 'This is the first time she has opened up to someone,' he says, 'and it's only natural that the old defence reaction would come back again at the end.'

In his exploration of the subconscious, Tchaikovsky was 'miles ahead of his time', says Jurowski. But there are examples of other innovations, too – such as the first meeting of the Prince and Odette in Act 2 (No 11: Scène) which, with its question-and-answer dialogue, signifies 'the first recitative to be composed in ballet'. Then there's the passage of disguised Russian Orthodox choral music in the Entr'acte opening Act 4, which is 'like a Requiem aeternam spoken across the two lovers'. The conductor also stresses how Tchaikovsky uses the leitmotif in *Swan Lake* 'to create a recognisable complex of thematic material which is associated with certain characters or situations'. The oboe theme representing Odette is the most obvious example, I say – but Jurowski isn't sure it's about Odette at all. 'It's a fantasy, an ideal. The piece is not about love but the *impossibility* of love. And this echoes Tchaikovsky's personal life, his homosexuality: he was close to suicide in those years.'

'Tchaikovsky uses repeats to accumulate nervous energy; they're there for a reason'

We turn to the music at the end of Act 1 (No 9: Finale) where the oboe plays that plaintive theme accompanied by rippling harp figurations. 'You get to the climax and it's dominated by flutes, clarinets, bassoons and only two horns,' Jurowski says, singing the well-known tune – 'Paaa, pa pa pa paa paaa ... And then, at the top of Act 2 [No 10: Scène], it's exactly the same music ...' [he sings again] '... and here comes the climax ...' [he crescendos] '... but now the winds become filling voices and we have *four* horns, blowing *fortissimo*. From now on, the theme only ever appears with four horns.'

What does this mean? 'Fate,' he says simply. But people view this as a romantic love story, I point out. 'Then they're not listening properly,' Jurowski retorts. 'It's in B minor, the same as the Sixth Symphony and the opening of *The Queen of Spades* – which even has the same B minor triad starting with a falling fifth. Without a doubt, it's suggesting a sinister presence.'

We talk again about the 1895 cuts and the damage they caused – even those seemingly innocuous ones involving repeats. 'We know from his operas and symphonies that Tchaikovsky accumulates nervous energy by repeating the same thing over and over,' Jurowski says. 'The repeats are there for a reason.' But, I venture, without the cuts perhaps the ballet would have never assumed its place in the repertory. 'I think we're missing the point if we're after some kind of elegant entertainment,' Jurowski counters. 'If you expect this music to shake you, to change your world, you should be prepared for a much more aggressive, abrasive experience.'  Vladimir Jurowski's *Swan Lake* will be reviewed in the next issue

PHOTOGRAPHY: JEAN-MARIE GEIJSEN

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









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Richard Bratby listens to premiere recordings of Stanford quartets:

'This must surely be the most significant quartet cycle by any British composer before Frank Bridge' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 57**



Charlotte Gardner enjoys Vivaldi from cellist Jean-Guihen Queyras:

'The sense of intimacy and immediacy is mostly down to Queyras's easy, loving familiarity with this repertoire' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 58**

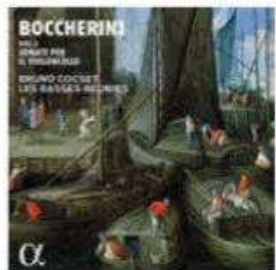
Boccherini

'Sonate per il violoncello, Vol 2'

Sonatas - G1; G2; G5; G12; G13

Bruno Cocset *vc* **Les Basses Réunies**

Alpha Ⓢ ALPHA409 (67' • DDD)



It's such a very long time since the French baroque cellist Bruno Cocset brought out

his first excellent Boccherini album – a 2004 recording featuring Sonatas Nos 4, 17 and 23 alongside the second and seventh Concertos (3/06) – that this latest offering of five further sonatas feels far more like a surprise gift than it does a standard Volume 2. The album is certainly a continuation, though, most especially because it sees Cocset develop an approach he brought to that previous disc's Sonata No 7, when he gave its bass-line accompaniment not to a second cello as usual but instead to a guitar, his stance being that there's no reason why Boccherini mightn't also have had other instruments in mind, especially given the range of occasions he may have performed at during his youthful concert tours of the 1760s.

So, while for No 5 in G and No 13 in A Cocset is joined simply by the cellist Emmanuel Jacques, for sombre and dramatic No 2 in C minor his partner is the fortepianist Maude Gratton on a wooden-hammered instrument in vogue during this period in Italy. No 1 in F meanwhile offers the standard mid-18th-century continuo template, Cocset and Jacques now joined by harpsichordist Bertrand Cuiller. Perhaps most enjoyable of all, though, is Sonata No 12, the disc's most 'classical' *galant* arrangement, for which Gratton rejoins Cocset and Jacques on a far fuller-toned piano with leather-covered hammers.

Needless to say, this is all fantastically thoughtful 'authentic' ear candy for those who like a bit of spice in their HIP, and Cocset himself is the icing on the cake. Playing an instrument specially constructed

by Charles Riché with Boccherini's violin-high writing in mind, his many golden moments include 2'34" to 3'21" in No 5's *Largo*, where first you have the soft-focus sweetness of his double-stopping, then the whistle-clean exuberance of his final top swoop. Or look to the opening of No 12's *Allegro moderato* for a moment when his *cantabile* phrasing and his instrument's sonorous middle registers shine.

So what I want to know now is: will there be a Volume 3? **Charlotte Gardner**

Brahms

Three Violin Sonatas. 'FAE' Scherzo, WoO2

Leila Schayegh *vn* **Jan Schultz** *pf*

Glossa Ⓢ GCD924201 (70' • DDD)



These interpretations of the Brahms violin sonatas delve far more deeply into

'historically informed performance practice' than any period-instrument recording I've heard. Beyond the instruments themselves (in this case a modern copy of a 'Romantic' violin and an 1879 Viennese piano by Streicher) and the judicious use of vibrato, pianist Jan Schultz arpeggiates his part profusely, violinist Leila Schayegh employs generous portamento and both musicians take an unusually flexible approach to rhythm and tempo. The rationale for these interpretative decisions is clearly and compellingly detailed in extensive notes by Clive Brown (who co-edited the Bärenreiter edition used here) and Schayegh.

There's no doubt in my mind that Brahms expected string players to use portamento, and that it's a significant expressive enhancement when applied thoughtfully, as it is here, with a few exceptions. Take the violin's soaring melody in the middle of Op 78's finale, for example (listen starting at 4'11"), where Schayegh slides as a singer might do naturally. Schultz's arpeggiation can

also have a salutary effect, as it does in that same sonata's opening bars, where rolling the chords adds subtle momentum that allows for a relaxed tempo yet still makes sense of Brahms's *Vivace ma non troppo* marking. Note, too, the duo's flexible shaping here; they find the space to be free between the beats, as it were, and the result is intoxicatingly improvisatory. Op 100 also begins magically, the phrases surging and sighing to convey a feeling of wide-eyed, ardent expectation.

These practices can be a double-edged sword, however. Take the *Adagio* of Op 108, where the combination of Schayegh's portamento and Schultz's arpeggiation – both applied lavishly, in this case – gives off a strong, wholly unnecessary whiff of sentimentality. And their rhythmic freedom and flexibility of tempo wreaks havoc in the outer movements of Op 108, chopping up the phrases, slackening tension and rendering the structures episodic.

Yet this is a satisfying disc nonetheless. The instruments' mellow sounds are absolutely lovely, every one of Schayegh and Schultz's tempos are spot on, and if I disagree with a few interpretative decisions, their expressive intentions are never in doubt. **Andrew Farach-Colton**

Bray

'Chamber and Solo Works'

Beyond^a. Invisible Cities^b. On the Other Shore^c.

The Sun was Chasing Venus^d. Zustände^e

^b**Huw Watkins** *pf* ^d**Amaryllis Quartet**;

^e**Mariani Piano Quartet** (Gerhard Vielhaber *pf*

^aPhilipp Bohnen *vn* ^{bd}Barbara Buntrock *va*

^cPeter-Philipp Staemmler *vc*)

Nimbus Alliance Ⓢ NI6371 (56' • DDD)



An earlier disc devoted to Charlotte Bray (1/15) has proved one of the most notable in NMC's Debut series and this new release of chamber works leaves no less favourable an impression.



Bruno Cocset plays Boccherini Cello Sonatas with sweetness and exuberance

The five pieces (written during 2011-16) are linked by a sense of distance, whether physical or emotional – not least *Zustände* ('States') for piano quartet, its three movements evoking the varied aura of glaciers as they split, float and emerge as ice fields, the music alternately calm and plangent. The subject of *Invisible Cities* may be urban but a corresponding 'otherness' is evident across its four movements as these unfold from the energetic, through the elegiac and anguished, to a tenuous rapprochement that is tellingly conveyed by the disjunctive timbres of viola and piano. No less finely judged in its writing for string quintet is *The Sun was Chasing Venus*, where a game of pursuit – musical and metaphysical – is related in a single movement whose vividly contrasted sections still evince a cumulative impetus as these build to the final evanescing of diaphanous textures, in a potent simile for clouds as they are caught by sunlight.

Performances are as adept and perceptive as might be expected from such artists as Barbara Buntrock and Huw Watkins, with the Mariani and Amaryllis ensembles equally committed. The three main works are separated by short yet eventful pieces

for violin and cello, no less well realised. Sound is full-bodied and immediate, with the booklet note deftly combining the composer's observations and comments by the artists. A worthy follow-up for Bray and the latest in a valuable series which is being made possible by the Richard Thomas Foundation. **Richard Whitehouse**

Mendelssohn

'String Quartets, Vol 1'

String Quartets - No 1, Op 12;

No 5, Op 44 No 3; No 6, Op 80

Doric Quartet

Label Ⓢ (two discs for the price of one)

CHAN20122 (87' • DDD)



What makes the Doric the Doric? Is it their ability to reveal detail, though never at the cost of broader spans? Or their elasticity of phrasing, combined with an absolute confidence of ensemble without ever seeming overly obsessed with it?

All the traits that characterise their playing are to be found in this first volume

of Mendelssohn quartets. They apply judicious portamento as they mould the opening bars of Op 12's *Adagio non troppo*, while the following *Allegro non tardante* has a suppleness that makes it sound constantly new.

In the Doric's Canzonetta, the faster middle section grows organically from the relaxed outer ones, rather than playing up the contrasts, as the Tippett Quartet do, finding an altogether more mischievous edge. The slow movement is the first violin's chance to take wing and the Doric's Alex Redington duly does, to warmly engaging effect, while the quartet's collective ear for balancing sonorities constantly illuminates the textures. The finale gets its energy from the way they phrase the lines, while the Tippett have a more obsessive, one-in-a-bar feel; compared to both of them, the Escher are a little earthbound.

The Doric's approach to Op 80 is less extreme than some – rather than going hell for leather in its first movement they instead draw out detail after detail along the way. If you want *sforzando* accents that rip through the music, then the Elias are still the ones to go for, but for something



Deeply absorbing: the Doric Quartet start a new project to record the string quartets of Mendelssohn

less searing, try this. The Elias continue their fraught agenda through the second movement, the Tippett also impressive here in their desperate energy. But the Doric see it as a heavier, slower scherzo and I'm not entirely convinced. The slow movement finds the Tippett the most Classical, the Ebène most obviously Romantic in their ardency. The Doric are closer to the Classical end of things, though a tremulously delicate vibrato gives their *Adagio* a touching fragility. Again, the Doric's finale is moderate in pace – is it really *Allegro molto*? – though I like the way the *fortissimo* writing breaks in with due drama. But for me, this movement demands more intensity, something the Ebène and Elias provide in spades.

If there are some caveats about the Sixth Quartet, there are none about the Fifth, the last of Op 44. The give and take as motifs are shared between the players in the first movement is unerring, and here their relaxed pace works well, sounding even more inevitable than the Escher. The Scherzo, initially at a whisper, has energy without sounding unduly rushed, while the slow movement is deeply absorbing, satisfying and sonorously sad. The Parker,

who impressed me, are faster here but both groups bring Mendelssohn's plangent writing to life. All sadness is banished in the rushing finale – the Parker bring to this a fearless energy but the Doric are just as mesmeric, displaying an unerring ability to draw out what's important from Mendelssohn's frenetic textures.

An impressive new addition to the Mendelssohn discography. **Harriet Smith**

String Quartets Nos 1 & 6 – selected comparison:

Tippett Qt (8/18) (SOMM) SOMMCD0182

String Quartet No 1 – selected comparison:

Escher Qt (8/15) (BIS) BIS-SACD1960

String Quartet No 6 – selected comparisons:

Elias Qt (5/07^R) (ALTO) ALC1303

Ebène Qt (4/13) (VIRG/ERAT) 464546-2

String Quartet No 5 – selected comparisons:

Parker Qt (A/16) (NIMB) NI6327

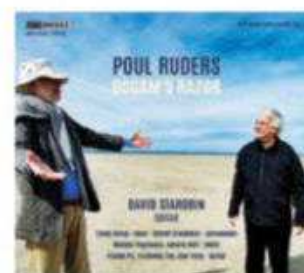
Escher Qt (12/16) (BIS) BIS2160

Ruders

'New Music with Guitar, Vol 11'

Air with Changes^a. New Rochelle Suite^b. Occam's Razor^c. Pages (excs). Schrödinger's Cat^d. Three for Two^e – Cantus firmus II & III

David Starobin *gtr* with ^c**Liang Wang** *ob* ^d**Amalia Hall**, ^e**Movses Pogossian** *vns* ^a**Xiaobo Pu**, ^a**Yunxiang Fan**, ^a**Hao Yang** *gtrs* ^b**Daniel Druckman** *perc*
Bridge © BRIDGE9500 (52' • DDD)



In honour of William of Ockham's famous dictum that the

simplest solution tends to be the correct one, the eighth and final movement of Poul Ruders's suite *Occam's Razor* (2013) is, in the composer's own words, 'the simplest music I've ever and am likely ever to compose'. There is plenty of complexity in the preceding seven, a character suite for oboe and guitar providing plenty of opportunities for sly, straight-faced humour here for Liang Wang and David Starobin.

Starobin, without doubt one of the world's greatest exponents of the guitar, has known Ruders for over 30 years and something of that longstanding relationship – which has produced many solo pieces, chamber music and two concertos – is celebrated in this enterprising and fascinating release. *Pages* is an open collection of to date 13 miniature solo pieces, all written on a single page, begun in 2008. Each takes a specific attribute and illustrates it in music

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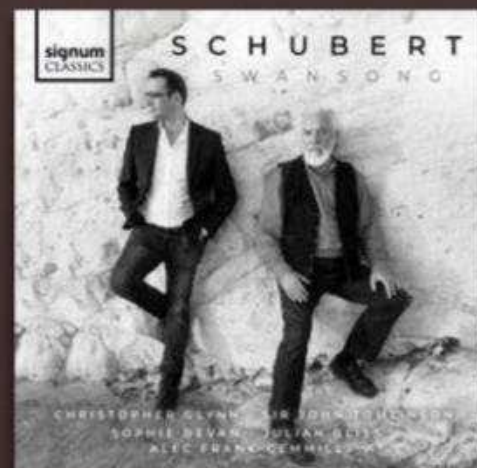
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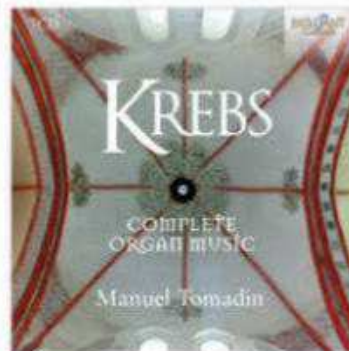
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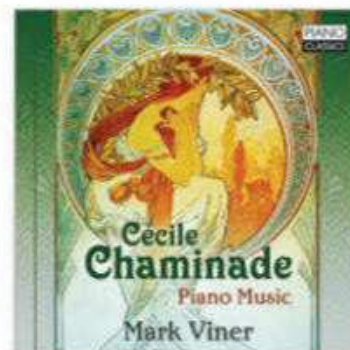
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of beguiling charm. Six are featured here, as are two cantus firmus from *Three for Two* (2016), a model of the expressivity possible from the utmost precision.

The 12 canons that comprise *Schrödinger's Cat* explore variously the space between musical precision and expressive liberality. The most complex music here, it is the work needing the closest listening. Not so the delightfully witty guitar-and-percussion *New Rochelle Suite* (2003-06), written for Starobin and his daughter Allegra, and the newest work, *Air with Changes* (2018), a beautifully vibrant variation set given here in Ruders's own version for guitar quartet, played by Starobin with three of his students. The performances throughout are wonderfully vivid and musical, and superbly engineered (being recorded in four locations on six occasions across eight years, 2010-18). Recommended. **Guy Rickards**

Schumann

Three String Quartets, Op 41

Engegård Quartet

BIS Ⓢ BIS2361 (75' • DDD/DSD)



The Norwegian Engegård Quartet have only recently started programming

single-composer discs (they released Mozart's 'Prussian' Quartets last year – LAWO Classics). The Schumanns are a fascinating and dangerous proposition for any quartet. In September I much enjoyed the First Quartet in a mixed disc from the Schumann Quartet. The Engegård are relatively laid-back in the *Andante espressivo* introduction and even in the *Allegro* they give the music plenty of space to breathe. The Elias play up the contrasts more, and their introduction is particularly intense, with the sparest of vibrato. In the Scherzo – a particular highlight in the Schumann Quartet's account – the Engegård sound a touch deliberate in their speed and phrasing, which makes the music unduly earthbound. The slow movement is more effective, however, and they choose an apt tempo for the finale, though they don't come close to the bounding energy of the Doric or the finesse of the Zehetmair.

In the Third it is the outer movements that come off best, the Engegård truly relishing the dancing finale. Though, if you turn to the recent Elias account, you're frankly in a different league in terms of finesse and responsiveness. The Engegård's second-movement Scherzo is a sunny affair, but how much more emotional complexity

is revealed by the inward Zehetmair. In the *Adagio molto* the Engegård make much of the intensifying dissonances (from 4'40") and the way they draw to a quiet close is nicely judged.

However, it's in the Second Quartet – the trickiest to bring off effectively – that I have the greatest doubts about this new disc. The opening sounds a little rushed, which is not a matter of speed per se but to do with their phrasing and the way they balance the four instruments; compared to them the Elias draw you into Schumann's world in the most naturally conversational way. In the variation-form *Andante* the Engegård find a simple songfulness in its main theme, whereas the Doric and the Elias bring to it greater emotional nuance. The flowing second variation doesn't have the degree of finesse of the Doric, while the chordal writing of the *Molto più lento* that follows is again more cleanly dispatched by the British group. The Scherzo, a real technical minefield, is a tad rough around the edges too (again, listen to the Elias to hear how energy and finesse can coexist perfectly naturally), though happily the finale comes off better. But, overall, this new disc doesn't alter the discographical status quo. **Harriet Smith**

String Quartets Nos 1-3 – selected comparison:

Doric Qt (12/11) (CHAN) CHAN10692

String Quartets Nos 1 & 3 – selected comparison:

Zehetmair Qt (6/03) (ECM) 472 169-2

String Quartet No 1 – selected comparisons:

Elias Qt (10/12) (WIGM) WHLIVE0051

Schumann Qt (9/18) (BERL) 0301058BC

String Quartets Nos 2 & 3 – selected comparison:

Elias Qt (5/18) (ALPH) ALPHA280

Stanford

String Quartets – No 3, Op 64;

No 4, Op 99; No 7, Op 166

Dante Quartet

Somm Céleste Ⓢ SOMMCD0185 (76' • DDD)



I think it was George Bernard Shaw who first remarked that Stanford

was at his best when he forgot to act like a professor and let his Irish roots show through. One achievement of the Dante Quartet's ongoing Stanford quartet cycle is to show just how wide of the mark these off-the-peg judgements can be – even if it's hardly surprising that they persist. All three of the works on this disc are premiere recordings, an astonishing state of affairs for what must surely be the most significant quartet cycle by any British composer before Frank Bridge. That alone makes this disc essential listening.

As for the music, Jeremy Dibble's excellent booklet notes identify several recognisably Irish traits. But you don't necessarily hear them as such. The feverish intensity of the jig that forms the finale of the Quartet No 4 (1906) might equally remind you of Schubert's *Death and the Maiden*, just as Stanford's questioning, chromatic opening gestures suggest more modern developments in Europe. True, Mendelssohn is the presiding spirit in No 3 (1896), and there's a sense of increased clarity and lyricism in No 7 (1919) – a hint of a 'late style'? Lucid, idiomatic string-writing comes as standard throughout.

But still, the point stands. These are distinctive, fully achieved works by a composer with a profoundly serious artistic purpose. They're each worth hearing, and the Dante Quartet go at them with red-blooded gusto and an energy that's clearly born from the thrill of discovery. You might wish, at times, that they'd let the music breathe a little more freely: these aren't what you'd call 'lived-in' performances. Hopefully those will come. For now, though, Somm and the Dantes have broken important new ground with impressive commitment. **Richard Bratby**

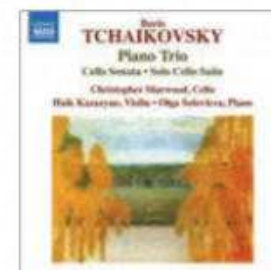
B Tchaikovsky

Piano Trio^a. Cello Sonata^b. Solo Cello Suite

Christopher Marwood ^{vc}

^aHaik Kazazyan ^{vn} ^{ab}Olga Solovieva ^{pf}

Naxos Ⓢ 8 573783 (61' • DDD)



Tchaikovsky's Piano Trio in B minor? No, not in A minor. Nor, indeed, that

Tchaikovsky. Naxos has done well by Boris Tchaikovsky (no relation to Pyotr Ilyich), this being the fifth disc dedicated to his music.

Tchaikovsky was born in 1925 and his compositional career spanned the second half of the 20th century. He studied at the Moscow Conservatory, a pupil of Shebalin, Shostakovich and Myaskovsky, and his teachers certainly left their mark. The Piano Trio which opens the disc was composed in 1953 and sounds like a pale Shostakovich imitation at times, lacking some of the intensity or sarcasm that laced his teacher's scores. If not quite the 'path-breaking' composer claimed in Louis Blois's booklet notes, Tchaikovsky's music is still worth a listen.

The Piano Trio is given a persuasive performance by Haik Kazazyan, Christopher Marwood and Olga Solovieva. We're thrown straight into a feisty toccata,

an exhilarating opening which largely leaves Tchaikovsky with nowhere to go. The piano suffers a little in terms of recorded balance here, strings dominating the sound picture. Kazazyan moulds the violin line of the lengthy Aria most sensitively. The finale – a set of variations – meanders but has its lively moments, with tight ensemble-playing impressive.

Marwood is firmly at the centre of this disc, performing the Cello Sonata (1957) and the Solo Cello Suite (1946), both works premiered by the great Mstislav Rostropovich. Like the Piano Trio, the Sonata (dedicated to Mieczysław Weinberg) starts off in impulsive mood. Marwood is swifter than Rostropovich's own recording (with the composer at the piano) and his polished tone gives the central *Largo* a sense of nobility. Marwood makes neat work of the busy five-movement Solo Suite, introverted in the melancholy Aria, nimbly leaping between octaves in the Capriccio. An interesting byway of 20th-century Soviet chamber music. **Mark Pullinger**

Cello Sonata – selected comparison:

Rostropovich, *B Tchaikovsky* (MELO) MELCD100 0944

Vivaldi

Six Cello Sonatas, Op 14

Jean-Guihen Queyras, Christoph Dangel vcs

Michael Behringer hpd/org **Lee Santana** theorbo

Harmonia Mundi © HMM90 2278 (71' • DDD)



There's a happy inevitability about French period cellists taking Vivaldi's six

cello sonatas into the recording studio, when the Bibliothèque Nationale de France still houses the manuscript copy used by unscrupulous Parisian publishers who first managed to publish the set in 1740, without Vivaldi's permission. What Queyras has come up with here is very fine, too. Plus it's satisfyingly different to Christophe Coin's beautifully slender-toned 1989 effort with Christophe Hogwood.

If you wanted one takeaway headline for this recording then it would be its sense of intimacy and immediacy; a quality we can mostly put down to the easy, loving familiarity with which Queyras handles this repertoire, but one which has also been heightened by his surrounding decision-making. For instance, while these days Queyras's usual cello is a 1696 instrument by the Turinese maker Gioffredo Cappa, for this Vivaldi he's returned to the intimate and soft-timbred anonymous Milanese cello of 1690 you hear on past

recordings such as the Haydn concertos (10/04) and the Britten Suites (1/99). He's then strung this with plain gut (rather than wound), and the slightly thicker girth of the strings has brought a lovely rounded warmth and textural catch to his sound. Finally there's the engineering, which places him relatively far forwards in the balance; but don't be put off by the intake of breath you hear in the first few seconds of the opening No 5 in E minor, because that's not a running theme.

Another nice touch is the way his continuo forces vary between sonatas, and sometimes within the same one. Take No 4 in B flat, which uses dulcet-toned organ in the first and second movements but in the third drops it for theorbo; this is followed by No 2 in F major, for which it's the harpsichord that fluidly dances in.

If you're in the market for a top period performance and want to do some comparative listening before taking the plunge, then I'd suggest either that Coin recording or the one from Marco Ceccato with Accademia Ottoboni. However, either way, you won't go wrong with this new recording. **Charlotte Gardner**

Selected comparisons:

Coin, Hogwood (4/89) (LOIL) ➔ 421 060-20H

Ceccato, Accademia Ottoboni (A/14)

(ZZT) ZZT338 or (ALPH) ALPHA325

'Mythes'

Bartók Rhapsody No 1, Sz86 **Ravel** Tzigane

Stravinsky Suite italienne **Szymanowski**

Mythes, Op 30 **Wieniawski** Légende, Op 17

Jiyeon Lee vn **Henry Kramer** pf

Champs Hill © CHRC141 (67' • DDD)



Jiyeon Lee's Champs Hill recital with Henry Kramer follows hard on the

heels of her remarkable debut album (Orchid, A/18), on which she played the Nielsen and Korngold concertos with the Odense Symphony under Kristiina Poska. The main work on the new disc is Szymanowski's *Mythes* and anyone already familiar with her performance of the Korngold will recognise the comparable qualities she brings to it.

There's an admirable refusal to hurry, so that Szymanowski's long, asymmetrical lines are given space to sing and breathe. Once again, you notice both her extraordinary sweetness of tone and the rapt, ecstatic way she takes each phrase, so that the music – this is Szymanowski at his most sensuous – really beguiles and seduces. Kramer is superb in this work,

too, filling in the filigree textures of 'La fontaine d'Aréthuse' with exquisite grace and underscoring the emotional shifts of 'Dryades et Pan' with nicely ambivalent wit.

It is a most beautiful performance, though our insights into the range of Lee's artistry ultimately come elsewhere. Stravinsky's *Suite italienne*, reworking music from *Pulcinella*, is all cool poise apart from a shaft of nostalgic regret in the Serenata, though Kramer's playing could do with a bit more hardness of edge in places. The real jolt, though, comes with Bartók's First Rhapsody, where there's a ferocity in Lee's playing at the start of the *lassù* and an extravagance in the way she phrases the *friss* that we haven't heard from her on disc before: Kramer's muscularity and aggression are exciting here, too.

A similar darkness of mood and weight of attack characterise the opening of Ravel's *Tzigane*, which is noble and suitably fiery, though Lee's way with it isn't as searching as some interpreters: place her beside, say, Ginette Neveu (6/49), and you're struck by the latter's ability to coax greater shades of meaning from the disparate phrases. With the piano entry, however, the performance really takes wing, with bravura playing from both of them, and tangible exhilaration at the conclusion. It's another fine disc from Lee, one that consolidates her growing reputation and marks her out as an artist to watch in future. **Tim Ashley**

'Poetical Humors'

Bull Goodnight. Myself **Dowland** Can she excuse my wrongs. Flow, my tears, fall from your springs. In darkness let me dwell. Shall I sue, shall I seek for grace? **East** And I as well as thou **Gibbons** Fantasia. Galliard a 3 **Hersant** Lully Lullay **Hume** Captain Humes Pavan. Sweete Musicke. Touch me sweetely. What greater grief **Tidrow** Into something rich and strange

Les inAttendus (Vincent Lhermet *accordion*

Marianne Muller *va da gamba*)

Harmonia Mundi © HMM90 2610 (62' • DDD)



At first sight, the young accordionist Vincent Lhermet and veteran viola da gamba player Marianne Muller seem the oddest of odd couples. But a shared passion for early and contemporary music – albeit in different proportions according to the nature of their instruments – and an 'artistic kinship and shared sensibility' led them to form the duo Les inAttendus.



Invigorating rhythmic energy: the Calidore Quartet offer a thought-provoking programme

But what of this seemingly odd instrumental combination? We find nothing odd about the bandoneón and double bass. It's all a matter of convention. Put aside your awareness of the accordion as 'modern', the gamba as 'ancient', and just listen. Their timbres, their ranges, their sonorities perfectly complement each other, as does these musicians' profoundly poetical playing. Especially in the music of the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods, when the variegated, dark-hued sounds of mixed consorts of strings, winds and plucked instruments and the delicate plaints of the lute song were heard throughout the kingdom.

It is into this world that Les inAttendus plunge us, paying deference to the Elizabethan cult of melancholy with sweetly plangent performances of works by Gibbons and Dowland, as well as Hume and East. In Hume's *What greater grief*, for example, swelling tones and reedy harmonies redolent of the portative organ usher in a programme where even such jaunty accordion solos like John Bull's *Goodnighte*, originally for keyboards, evoke a sailor's squeezebox yet are tinged with sadness and regret. Even the two superb works written especially for the duo, Thierry Tidrow's *Into something rich and strange* and Philippe Hersant's *Lully lullay*

find their roots in the past while rendering it truly another land. Rich and strange indeed. It is fitting that Dowland's *In darkness let me dwell* should bring the curtain down on this this gorgeous and moving recital. **William Yeoman**

'Resilience'

Golijov *Tenebrae* **Janáček** String Quartet No 1, 'The Kreutzer Sonata' **Mendelssohn** String Quartet No 6, Op 80 **Prokofiev** String Quartet No 2, Op 92

Calidore Quartet

Signum © SIGCD551 (81' • DDD)



The cover of this new release from the Calidore Quartet has the four players standing in sunglasses in a Manhattan street, with the Freedom Tower rising behind them. In this business you don't judge a book by its cover, but I can't entirely discount the possibility that this was why, as they launch into Prokofiev's Second Quartet – and repeatedly throughout the disc – I kept thinking of minimalism.

That's meant in the most positive way, of course. Everything here has a clarity and

an underlying rhythmic energy that I found enormously invigorating, whether in their bracing approach to Mendelssohn's tragic F minor Quartet – a near ideal meeting of lyricism and high tension – or the playful rhythmic kick-and-a-swing they give to the Prokofiev. The booklet explains that the album is themed around the idea of human resilience in the face of suffering, but Prokofiev's folk-inspired quartet has a playful spirit, even though it was written in wartime, and that comes through with real warmth and wit.

In fact, for all the crisp attention to detail (listen to those *sul ponticello* stabs), the two central works in the programme – Janáček's *The Kreutzer Sonata* and Osvaldo Golijov's millennial meditation *Tenebrae* – come off as pensive rather than pointed. The recorded sound is translucent and upfront but the individual players repeatedly find a sweetness of expression (cellist Estelle Choi's long, high solo in the Golijov is a case in point) that sets up a fascinating tension with the group's overall dynamism, and indeed objectivity. Freshness doesn't have to be chilly, and precision needn't inhibit expression. These lively, intelligent performances of an attractive and thought-provoking programme offer compelling proof.

Richard Bratby

Ida Haendel

Rob Cowan pays tribute to the indomitable British violinist of Polish birth, a pupil of both Enescu and Flesch who has been in the limelight since she was six – and is soon to turn 90

Back in July 2013 at London's Cadogan Hall I had the good fortune to conduct an onstage interview with one of the violin legends of the 20th century, Ida Haendel. Although by then in her mid-eighties, she also performed for us. Earlier on, Haendel had told me that while still a child she performed Bach for her teacher Enescu, who disappointingly made no comment either way on her playing. During that evening she tackled Enescu's own profoundly rhapsodic Third Sonata accompanied by the Serbian pianist Misha Dacić, a reading that, although frail, was greeted by sudden flashes of expressive intensity. It was a warming experience. As I said to her at the time, 'It seems to me that Enescu was making amends for not reacting to your Bach by bringing his own spirit to your playing of his Third Sonata.' She enjoyed the evening, regaling us with many fond memories, not least of her work with the conductors Sergiu Celibidache and Sir Thomas Beecham.

Mastering the earth-and-fire rhetoric of Enescu's Third has been the privilege of very few. Apart from Enescu himself, one could cite Menuhin, Ferras and, more recently, Sherban Lupu; and Haendel can for certain be admitted to their ranks, at least in principle. A late recording (1996) with Vladimir Ashkenazy (Decca), although pianistically vivid, finds her sounding thin-toned, whereas an earlier concert recording (1980) with Ronald Turini (Doremi) frees her muse to wander without hindrance from a compromised technique. As I've said before in these pages, whenever I tune in to Haendel on the radio without knowing who's playing, I invariably sit transfixed until the announcer gives the game away. I am never surprised, and yet discussions about 'great' fiddlers on disc too often relegate her to the sidelines.

As a pupil of Carl Flesch and Enescu, she represents

a golden age, but her extensive travels, her triumphs at the Proms and her ageless energy pin her as much to the new generation as to the old.

She was born in 1928 to a Polish Jewish family in Chełm, and her talents came to the fore when she picked up her sister's violin aged three. Major competition triumphs followed (including winning the 1933 Huberman prize). As to her recording career, 1940 marked its starting point (mostly

short pieces), whereas five years later she recorded the Tchaikovsky Concerto (under Basil Cameron) and, two years after that, the Dvořák (the latter available on Pristine and as a download).

Coming more up to date, a pair of Testament releases of 1970s recordings attest to Haendel's svelte, sensitively modulated playing, particularly 'Popular Encores' (SBT1259). Turn then to 'Baroque Transcriptions' (SBT1258) and you have what in my view is a genuinely great violin CD, one to place alongside those where Heifetz, Szigeti, Elman, Campoli or Aaron Rosand (to name but five) tackle similar repertoire with parallel levels of expressive generosity. With Haendel you invariably sense that ecstatic

control of melodic line, that holding fast to the harmonic thread – musically, patiently and with the inimitable touch of a true craftsman. Compare two Haendel versions of Bach's Chaconne – one from the 1960s (live, Doremi), the other from the '90s (Testament); while the tempos are quite similar, it's fascinating to gauge the way in which she emphasises certain phrases on the earlier version, almost like a question and answer sequence, as compared with the marginally more classical approach of the later version.

Another interesting point of comparison concerns two recordings of the Elgar Concerto – one recorded in the studio in the 1970s (under Sir Adrian Boult), the

Sibelius wrote to her: 'I congratulate myself that my concerto has found an interpreter of your rare standard'

DEFINING MOMENTS

•1935 – *Prodigy*

At the age of six she competes against the likes of David Oistrakh and Ginette Neveu to become a laureate of the first International Henryk Wieniawski Violin Competition, having already, two years earlier, won both the Warsaw conservatoire's gold medal and the Huberman prize with performances of Beethoven's Concerto

•1937 – *Proms association begins*

Makes her London debut under the baton of Sir Henry Wood, which brings her worldwide critical acclaim. She begins a lifelong association with the Proms music festival, where she has appeared some 68 times

•1952-1989 – *Canadian years*

Lives in Montreal. Her collaborations with Canadian orchestras earn her considerable celebrity in Canadian musical life

•1973 – *Chinese privilege*

Is the first Western soloist invited to China following the Cultural Revolution

•2006 – *Celebrity status*

Performs for Pope Benedict XVI at the former Nazi concentration camp Auschwitz-Birkenau. Subsequent engagements include a tribute concert at London's National Gallery in 2010 in celebration of Dame Myra Hess's wartime concerts



other live in the 1980s (under Sir John Pritchard); the live version is swifter than the studio one by about six minutes. The two performances feel entirely different.

Hänssler Classic's SWR Music released two repertory staples played with considerable poise, passion and tonal allure (CD94 205): Haendel's impressive staccato bowing and warm, almost Elman-like tone elevates a 1960 broadcast of Tchaikovsky's Concerto well above the norm; the coupling, a 1965 Dvořák Concerto, takes a little time to settle but the *Adagio ma non troppo* is gloriously played, easily a match for Suk or David Oistrakh. But although Haendel's recording career reaches back to the shellac age, perhaps the pinnacle of her art on disc, apart from a magisterial late (1995) set of Bach solo works for

Testament, are the recordings she made for Supraphon with the Czech Philharmonic and Prague Symphony orchestras. Lalo's *Symphonie espagnole* enjoys biting attack and luscious tonal projection, and the Sibelius Concerto (both under Karel Ančerl) reminds us that Haendel's

interpretation of this passionate perennial elicited a fan letter from the composer himself, saying, 'I congratulate you on the great success, but most of all I congratulate myself, that my concerto has found an interpreter of your rare standard.' As to Wieniawski, listening to her scintillating version of his Second Concerto (also on Supraphon), we might recall that Haendel was a laureate of the first International Henryk Wieniawski Violin Competition in 1935 – she was just six years old.

To describe Haendel as a last survivor from the virtuoso old guard would seem mildly glib; similarly, to say that she's an institution is rather like a half-hearted compliment. Better, perhaps, to praise the vibrancy of a player who ticks only those boxes that she deems it necessary to tick

(not for her the ascetic manners of authentic instrument performance). She's a true individual in every musical sense of the term. For those and other qualities, her art will forever be celebrated wherever there are listeners who know what quality violin playing is all about. **G**

THE ESSENTIAL RECORDING



'Baroque Transcriptions'

Ida Haendel *vn* Geoffrey Parsons *pf*
Testament (8/02)

Haendel proves herself the archetypal practitioner of *bel canto* tone projection, and with a well-honed technique. Parsons is an ideal collaborator and the sound is superb in these recordings made in 1976.

Instrumental



Michelle Assay hears a nocturnal programme from Dénes Várjon:

'In the Bartók, Várjon elicits sharply profiled textures and finds an instinctive balance between detachment and expressivity' ► [REVIEW ON PAGE 65](#)



Jed Distler on Hélène Grimaud's latest concept album:

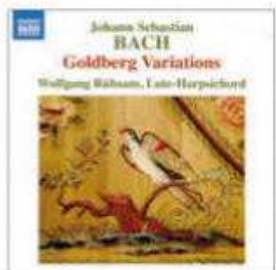
'Grimaud's phrasing of Satie's evocative right-hand melody takes on a shimmering, disembodied aura' ► [REVIEW ON PAGE 72](#)

JS Bach

Goldberg Variations, BWV988

Wolfgang Rübsam lute-hpd

Naxos 8 573921 (78' • DDD)



There is already a rich catalogue of recordings made on the Lautenwerk, or lute-harpsichord, by the organist, pianist, teacher and sound engineer Wolfgang Rübsam for his own Counterpoint Records. Not only Bach's *Art of Fugue*, the complete *Well-Tempered Clavier* and transcriptions of Bach's Cello Suites but also the keyboard music of Pachelbel and one of Bach's early masters, Georg Böhm. This recording of Bach's *Goldberg Variations* on the same superb instrument, built by Rübsam's friend Keith Hill, was therefore not unexpected. But it is surprising nonetheless. And quite wonderful.

Bach never wrote directly for lute; his works for the instrument are transcriptions from his pre-existing music or were written for the lute-harpsichord, an instrument designed to imitate the sound of the lute. In this it seemed remarkably successful: Bach's student Agricola once wrote that a lute-harpsichord could fool experienced lutenists.

Hill's lute-harpsichord has one manual, one set of gut strings activated by one of two sets of jacks – which mimic the way a lutenist moves his right hand closer to or further from the bridge to achieve different sound effects – and a set of brass strings which vibrate in sympathy with the plucked strings. It's a beautiful, intimate, mellow sound, resonant yet with each note decaying quickly, recorder-warm rather than lute-pungent, which Rübsam exploits to the full. From the opening Aria through each of the 30 variations to the Aria *da capo*, whether canon, dance or overture, his *cantabile*,

'horizontal' conception of the work results in an improvisatory quality that is nevertheless characterised by absolute clarity and fidelity to Bach's architecture. **William Yeoman**

JS Bach

'The Complete Organ Works, Vol 8'

Ach Gott und Herr, BWV714. Concerto, BWV593 (after Vivaldi, Op 3 No 8). Fugue, BWVAnh42. Jesus, meine Zuversicht, BWV728. O Lamm Gottes unschuldig, BWV656. Prelude and Fugue, 'Wedge', BWV548. Prelude, BWV568. Toccata and Fugue, 'Dorian', BWV538. Trio, BWV1027a. Trio Sonata No 4, BWV528. Valet will ich dir geben, BWV736

David Goode [org](#)

Signum 8 SIGCD808 (71' • DDD)

JS Bach

'The Complete Organ Works, Vol 9'

Fantasia, BWV571. Fantasia and Fugue, BWV537. Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott, BWV720. Fughetta 'Das Jesulein soll doch mein Trost', BWV702. Liebster Jesu, wir sind hier, BWV730. Preludes and Fugues – BWV531; BWV543. Sei gegrüßet, Jesu gütig, BWV768. Trios – BWV585 (after Fasch); BWV586 (after Telemann). Wir glauben all' an einen Gott', BWV765

David Goode [org](#)

Signum 8 SIGCD809 (73' • DDD)

Both discs played on the organ of Trinity College Chapel, Cambridge



Having safely passed the halfway point of his 15-disc traversal of the complete Bach organ works for Signum Classics, David Goode continues to delight and edify in equal measure with this worthy project, which also marks the 40th anniversary of the installation of the Metzler organ in the chapel of Trinity College, Cambridge. Player and instrument are both on top form.

Vol 8 opens in fine style with a sweeping rendition of the *Dorian* Toccata and Fugue. In the toccata semiquaver figuration is kept clear and light, with an occasional pleasing extra mordent thrown in to keep the listener on their toes. The broad and stately Fugue flows its steady course to a mighty conclusion. A pair of manual-only chorale preludes then clears the air for the fourth Trio Sonata in E minor, with its syncopated opening *Vivace*, floating central *Andante* (exquisitely registered) and jaunty minuet finale. The flourish-some Prelude BWV568 shows Goode's rhetorical rubato to its best advantage and he maintains a high voltage of excitement in the outer movements of the sparkling Vivaldi concerto arrangement, BWV593. The rest of the disc is just as rewarding, especially the Trio arrangement of the G major Sonata for gamba and harpsichord, BWV1027a, and in the final *Wedge* Prelude and Fugue Goode really opens up the organ, squeezing as much emotional feeling from its rich choruses as possible.

Vol 9 follows in a similar pattern of judicious programming with a pair of sparkling Preludes and Fugues topping and tailing the disc. The centrepiece is the 20-minute chorale partita on *Sei gegrüßet, Jesu gütig* in a compelling performance, both interpretatively and in the thorough exploration of the Metzler's colours. For me, though, the highlight of the disc is the heart-wrenching C minor Fantasia and Fugue, BWV537. Please banish all memories of Elgar's luscious orchestration: here is the original in all its glory. In the shorter pieces one might quibble, for example, with the use of a 16ft register in the pedal part of the chorale prelude on *Wir glauben all' an einen Gott*, BWV740, but this series is notable for the flair, clarity and spontaneity that Goode brings to this timeless music. Beautifully recorded, both discs deserve the widest currency.

Malcolm Riley



High-voltage excitement: David Goode goes beyond the halfway mark in his survey of Bach's organ works

JS Bach

Six Solo Viola (Cello) Suites, BWV1007-1012

Kim Kashkashian *va*

ECM New Series © 481 7176 (143' • DDD)



Performing Bach's Cello Suites in a transcription for viola is nothing new.

Among other viola versions that I have to hand, Lillian Fuchs recorded all six for American Decca years ago (a CD reissue is available from Doremi), William Primrose set five of them down in his later years (occasionally flawed performances that ring true in purely musical terms; Biddulph) and there's Nobuko Imai's admirable Philips set which, in general terms, compares well with Kashkashian, though the latter's wider tonal palette and sense of fantasy often incline me in her direction. With Kashkashian, there's an invariable tendency to sing out, an appealing ease of movement, and when we reach the written rest within bar 48 of the Prelude to the D minor Suite, Kashkashian – like Yo-Yo Ma on his most recent version of the cello original (Sony, A/18) – makes the gesture pregnant with

meaning. Nobuko Imai treads a straighter path; and then there's Fuchs, with her consistent vibrato and warmth of tone, very much a style of yesteryear but extremely beautiful, building inexorably towards that rest, stressing the chord that precedes it, the whole process more eventful than the rest itself. Kashkashian I think nails the passage from the standpoint of a superior stylistic balance.

To mention just a handful of additional observations that I noted while listening to this latest set, in Kashkashian's hands the opening measures of the Menuet of the G major Suite are colourfully articulated, the initial phrase which ends on a trill (bars 1-4) warmly rounded, its successor (bars 7-8) more assertive. Then there's a small rest before the embellished repeat. With Imai, Kashkashian's most apposite rival, there's no pause, no embellishment for the repeat and less in the way of colouristic variation. Then, in the closing Gigue, Kashkashian expressively slows the pace just after the beginning, whereas Imai keeps to her initial tempo. Her playing is rather more formal and forceful than Kashkashian's whereas, in viola-playing terms, I couldn't imagine a more dignified or sublimely expressed account of the C minor's Prelude than Kashkashian's.

Imai's closely recorded option is more grainy, a little halting too, although it is superbly played. Kashkashian eases into the single-line fugal section with such natural facility that you could hardly imagine it being better done. Her handling of the oft-excerpted Sarabande has a winning sense of stillness about it, whereas Imai, taking a significantly slower tempo, lays the music on a thicker carpet of tone. Fuchs's vibrant, singing line provides another manner of musical seduction.

As to the Gavotte sequence from the Sixth Suite, the pitch is lower on Imai's version, while Kashkashian handles this delightful movement with the lightest touch. By comparison, Fuchs's obdurate forcefulness won't appeal to all; but, as I've already suggested, her playing has a real sense of purpose, Casals I would imagine having provided some sort of interpretative template.

Viewed overall, Kashkashian delivers handsomely on all fronts and I extend a warm welcome to her expertly engineered new set, which is much enhanced by a typically imaginative roster of illustrations and superb notes by Paul Griffiths.

Rob Cowan

Selected comparison:

Imai (10/99[®]) (PHIL) ➔ 475 6219PM2



harmonia
mundi

JEAN-GUIHEN QUEYRAS

ANTONIO VIVALDI
SONATAS FOR CELLO
& BASSO CONTINUO
MICHAEL BEHRINGER | LEE SANTANA | CHRISTOPH DANGEL

An eloquent interpreter of Vivaldi, Jean-Guihen Queyras has already recorded several cello concertos by this composer – an album acclaimed by critics and music lovers alike. His latest homage to the Venetian master features an inspired selection of cello sonatas also written in his brilliant concertante style. 'Pisendel once submitted an attempt at a concerto to his teacher. Vivaldi immediately divested it of half its notes: one must know how to leave enough space for the miracle to filter through.' (Olivier Fourés)



Photo © Thomas Dorn

HMM 902278

harmoniamundi.com



Stylistically engaging: Alexandra Papastefanou plays Bach's '48' with an exploratory sense of character

JS Bach

Das wohltemperirte Clavier, BWV846-893

Alexandra Papastefanou *pf*

First Hand © ④ FHR65 (4h 42' • DDD)



Alexandra Papastefanou first came to my attention via a

mesmerising performance of Dimitri Mitropoulos's rarely heard Piano Sonata but her credentials as a Bach scholar and interpreter stretch back for decades, including a long-unavailable 1991 recording of Book 1 of *The Well-Tempered Clavier* for the Greek label Musica Viva. She has now recorded all 48 Preludes and Fugues anew, revealing herself to be a seasoned and stylistically engaging Bach pianist.

Salient aspects of harpsichord technique inform Papastefanou's approach, such as varied legato articulations and arpeggiations, strong finger independence, plus the occasional use of agogic caesuras and tenutos to demarcate phrase groupings and points of harmonic tension. Sometimes these expressive gestures momentarily pull focus away from the music's natural

rhythmic flow, as the Book 1 C sharp minor Fugue and B flat minor Prelude bear out. At other times, however, they insightfully illuminate, such as in four-voice fugues where the lines interact at close range like the Book 1 A minor and Book 2 G minor. Papastefanou avoids Gouldian extremes of pacing, yet certain tempo choices surprise. Her lyrically ruminative Book 2 C minor Prelude, for instance, differs from the lilting *détaché* of the Hewitt and Schiff remakes, while, by contrast, her Book 2 F major Fugue is unusually brisk and bouncy. The Book 1 D sharp minor and Book 2 G sharp minor Fugues also take uncommon wing as Papastefanou liberates them from their dirge-like pedestals.

The aforementioned independence of Papastefanou's fingerwork explains her ability to cogently balance contrapuntal lines in relation to one another, as well as to follow them through to their final destination. A good example of this can be found in the Book 2 C sharp minor Fugue, where her sprightly pulse still allows each entrance of the elaborate subject to take eloquent shape. She also brings out the Book 1 A major Fugue's cross-rhythmic implications while not overdoing the *détaché* articulation. Note, too, how her

two-note phrase groupings in the Book 2 B flat Fugue subject are so supple that they sound bowed rather than hammered.

Other textural felicities include Papastefanou's downplaying the Book 1 G minor Prelude's trills to a haunting murmur. Her beautifully regulated Steinway concert grand doesn't hurt, and neither does First Hand's luminous recorded sound. Space-challenged collectors will further appreciate the label's 'DigiSleeve' packaging. Beyond question, Papastefanou more than holds her own alongside the catalogue's top piano versions of the '48'. **Jed Distler**

Bartók • Ravel • Schumann

'De la nuit'

Bartók Out of Doors, Sz81 **Ravel** Gaspard de la nuit **Schumann** Fantasiestücke Op 12

Dénes Várjon *pf*

ECM New Series © 481 7003 (66' • DDD)



No doubts about the qualifications of Ravel's *Gaspard* for a disc entitled 'Of the Night'. But only three of Schumann's eight *Fantasiestücke* fit the bill (why not

give us his *Nachtstücke* instead?), and only one of Bartók's *Out of Doors*. No wonder the booklet note writer clutches at straws, claiming that all three pieces require a pianist 'for whom transcendent virtuosity is second nature' (*Gaspard* for sure, Bartók not really and Schumann hardly, apart from 'Traumes Wirren') and that all three have 'unusual poetic titles' (same comment).

But never mind the packaging, what about the product? Notwithstanding Várjon's acclaimed interpretations of Schumann's chamber music in collaboration with Steven Isserlis, his *Fantasiestücke* lack depth of feeling and perspective in the sound. His rapidly predictable agogic accents are no substitute. And while he clearly makes an effort to convey the poetry and rhetoric of Eusebius's replies to the stormy Florestan, he does not find the interiorising quality that the dialogue demands (if in doubt, hear Richter for the real thing).

Still, Várjon's Schumann is a good deal more successful than his Ravel, at least as far as 'Ondine' and 'Le gibet' are concerned. Even before invoking the unfair comparison of the matchlessly shimmering and hypnotic Michelangeli (several different accounts available), Várjon's textures feel lumpy, his phrasing too choppy and his voicing of the main lines unconvincing. Conveying the emotional core of 'Scarbo' seems to be his priority, and here he is admirably competent, even though his interpretation is a tableau predominantly painted in reds, whereas shades of silver would have been the colour of choice.

With his Hungarian compatriot, Várjon is suddenly in his element. The sound world of *Out of Doors* is far better suited to his technique and temperament. From the angularity of 'With Drums and Pipes' to the creepily flickering 'Music of the Night', Várjon elicits sharply profiled textures and finds an instinctive balance between detachment and expressivity. Overall, he is not helped by the unduly close recording, which captures breathing and pedal noise all too realistically and probably contributes to the rather overbearing, metallic quality in the sound. **Michelle Assay**

Beethoven

Piano Sonatas - No 30, Op 109;
No 31, Op 110; No 32, Op 111

Alexandre Tharaud *pf*

Erato (P) 9029 56338-2; (P) (C) 9029 56337-8
(62' • DDD)



Alexandre Tharaud is a musician of wide interests, as compelling in the

Baroque as he is delightful in a favourite disc of mine, 'Le boeuf sur le toit' (12/12). Now he has gone mainstream, with Beethoven's last three sonatas.

He brings to Op 109's opening movement a suitable effortlessness, contrasting a billowing airiness with a steelier approach to the recitative-like writing. One of Tharaud's stylistic traits is clarity of fingerwork and that is certainly much in evidence in the brief *Prestissimo* Scherzo, but I found the accentuation somewhat underwhelming, which lessened the sense of contrast that musicians such as Kovacevich and Annie Fischer find. On the other hand, Tharaud brings to the theme on which the finale variations are based a solemnity without sounding portentous, the following variations by turn poised (No 1) and energetic (No 3), with the fugal writing of No 5 clearly etched. But the closing moments of the sonata don't reach the transcendental state of, say, Uchida.

The same traits come through in the remaining two sonatas. To generalise, Tharaud is most convincing in the more moderately tempered music: he imbues the first movement of Op 110 with a refreshing airiness but the second (*Allegro molto*) is slightly careful-sounding, the rough edges sanded smooth. How much more drive Uchida finds here without ever resorting to ugliness. Whereas she has you hanging on her every note, Tharaud sounds as if he's still feeling his way in this repertoire. The following *Adagio* is beautifully shaded, and when the fugue enters he gives it a Bachian feel, *molto legato*, pacing the build-up to the climax well. But as the emotional temperature hots up, Tharaud can't find the necessary edge of desperation.

That is true of the first movement of Op 111 too, whose opening misses the vital tension that makes Bavouzet's version stand out, with his grandeur of vision in the *Maestoso* and a mightiness of intent in the following *Allegro*. Tharaud's Arietta theme is, on the other hand, tenderly given, and I liked his sense of growth as the variations develop. I was, however, slightly surprised he didn't make more of the anarchically jazzy third one, though the high-lying writing in the fourth is given an iridescent glow. And yet, as the trilling travels ever higher up the keyboard, it's not as ethereal in effect as the finest, Uchida and Levit

both extraordinarily intense by comparison. While Tharaud's quiet coda is suitably valedictory, it doesn't feel as if he has travelled as far as some in this work.

Harriet Smith

Selected comparisons – coupled as above:

Uchida (5/06) (PHIL) 475 6935PH

Levit (11/13) (SONY) 88883 74735-2

Bavouzet (12/16) (CHAN) CHAN10925 or CHAN10960

Kovacevich (WARN) 9029 58692-2

Piano Sonata No 30 – selected comparison:

A Fischer (WARN) 2564 63412-3

Chopin

Complete Nocturnes

Ingrid Fliter *pf*

Linn (P) (C) CKD565 (107' • DDD)



Pianists who record Chopin's Nocturnes usually sequence the works by opus

number. Ingrid Fliter differs from most by devising a running order full of intriguing juxtapositions, as did Earl Wild. Such programming savvy makes sense if you plan on listening to all of the Nocturnes in one sitting.

For example, the B major Nocturne, Op 32 No 1, nonchalantly slips right into Op 9 No 3 in the same key. One doesn't have to study music theory to aurally sense the subtle unity of key relationships between disc 1's last four selections (C minor, A flat, B and E minor). And two Nocturnes in the same key back-to-back make a striking pair, as the grace and simplicity of the E flat Op 9 No 2 give way to the polyphonic intensity of the E flat Op 55 No 2.

There's no questioning Fliter's innate affinity for Chopin, as numerous past recordings prove. Think of her freshly minted EMI B minor Sonata and cycle of Waltzes, her imaginative Mazurka-playing, and her exquisitely sculpted runs and roulades in both concertos. By contrast, Fliter's Chopin Preludes, Op 28, for me at least, blurred the lines between inspiration and mannerism, and so do stretches of her new Nocturne cycle.

While she is bent on moving Op 15 No 2's phrases over the bar lines, there's no perceptible harmonic or structural basis to her speedings-up and slowings-down, not to mention her capricious dynamics. She underlines the D flat Op 27 No 2's *bel canto*-inspired details at the expense of the music's sense of repose and *cantabile* eloquence, whereas Maria João Pires's shimmering long lines create far more mobility at an altogether slower tempo.



In his element in Bartók: Dénes Várjon combines the music of his compatriot with evocative works by Ravel and Schumann

Indeed, Fliter's live 2003 Concertgebouw traversal (VAI) was far more vibrant, direct and all of a piece.

Fliter takes an eternity over Op 32 No 2's opening two *Lento* measures, while her rhythmic fussing in the central episode dissipates the music's build and ultimately undermines the impact and inevitability of the *Appassionato* climax that an even more rhetorical artist like Claudio Arrau judges to shattering perfection. She also loses the momentum of the *agitato* pedal-point passage leading into Op 27 No 1's *con anima*, which in turn loses its climactic aura on account of Fliter's mincing ritenutos.

Paradoxically, Fliter realises her poetic potential most convincingly when she plays straight and doesn't try so hard to interpret. Cases in point include her ethereal, almost offhand separation of melody and accompaniment in Op 48 No 2's main section, the shapely introspection she brings to Op 37 No 1 and the gentle lilt in the posthumous C sharp minor's central mazurka episode. On the whole, Fliter's conceptions stand at different stages of ripening, as opposed to the divergent yet fully formed vantage points characterising the classic Arrau, Rubinstein, Pires and Moravec Nocturne cycles. **Jed Distler**

Selected comparisons:

Rubinstein (2/68^R) (SONY) 88697 69041-2

Arrau (6/79^R) (PHIL) 456 336-2PM2 or 464 694-2PM2

Pires (10/96) (DG) 447 096-2GH2 or 477 9568GM2

Moravec (10/12) (SUPR) SU4097-2

Chopin

Piano Concertos - No 1, Op 11^a; No 2, Op 21^b

Dina Yoffe *pf*

Fryderyk Chopin Institute © NIFCCD034
(75' • DDD)

Recorded ^b2010, ^a2013



For anyone who may have missed it, Poland is assuming a leadership position in the use of historical instruments by pianists. In addition to a number of interesting recordings made over the past decade or so, just this September the Fryderyk Chopin Institute mounted the First International Chopin Competition on period instruments, with subsequent competitions slated to occur every five years. Contestants were offered a choice of six antique pianos: three Érards, two Pleyels and a Broadwood.

One recent fruit of this salutary initiative is a recording of the solo versions of both

Chopin concertos by Dina Yoffe, using an 1848 Pleyel for the E minor Concerto and an 1838 Érard for the F minor.

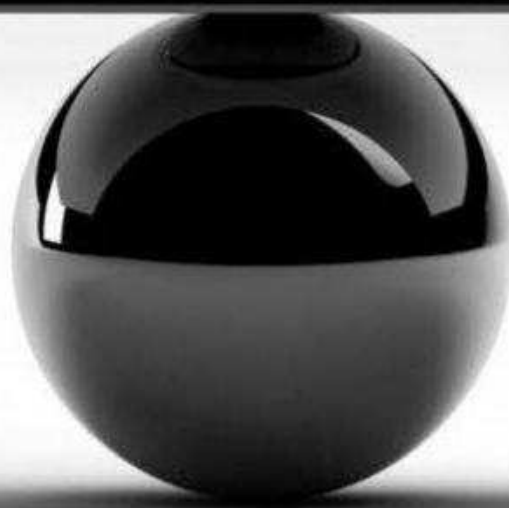
A native of Riga and graduate of the Moscow Conservatory, Yoffe is artistic director of the Malaga summer festival in Spain and teaches at the Hamburg Conservatory. If any justification were needed for this project it would be that the full orchestral scores for both Chopin concertos weren't collated and published until the 1860s. The versions heard here, or ones accompanied by string quartet or quintet, were the way these pieces were most frequently experienced during Chopin's lifetime.

Yoffe's performances achieve a genuine sweep, as well as a personal stamp, not always encountered in performances of the concertos with orchestra. Always poised and rhythmical, Yoffe's rubato is chaste and effective. The orchestral *tuttis* are seamlessly integrated and receive the same imagination and fastidious attention to detail as is lavished on the solo part. For those who consider the *Larghetto* of the F minor Concerto the crux of Chopin's concertante art, Yoffe's reading is direct, heartfelt and exquisitely atmospheric.

My only reservation about Yoffe's interpretative choices occurs in the Rondo

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of the E minor Concerto. Surely it would have made more sense, in the *kujawiak* passages where the solo part sings the melody in octaves at 3'10"ff and 8'18"ff, to have dropped the left-hand doubling and maintain instead some element of the delicate string accompaniment, rather than leaving the tune unsupported by the harmonies for 36 bars.

That quibble aside, Yoffe plays these instruments as though she's known them since childhood. Her intelligent and sensitive performances will be a welcome addition to any Chopin library.

Patrick Rucker

Ives

Piano Sonata No 2, 'Concord, Mass, 1840-1860'

Daniel Brylewski *pf* with

Carolyn Ralser *fl* Paulina Ryjak *va*

Dux © DUX1313 (49' • DDD)

'From the Early 20th ...'

Enescu Carillon Nocturne Ives Piano Sonata No 2, 'Concord, Mass, 1840-1860' Nielsen Three Pieces, Op 59 Schoenberg Two Pieces, Op 33

Andrew Rangell *pf*

Steinway & Sons © STNS30100 (69' • DDD)



In the 80 years since John Kirkpatrick gave Ives's Concord Sonata its first complete performance, the music has evolved from a pianistic Mount Everest scaled by a brave few to an international repertoire staple equally embraced by proficient young virtuosos such as Daniel Brylewski and older maverick personalities like Andrew Rangell.

Brylewski approaches Ives's combative and convoluted keyboard-writing with a scrupulous eye and ear for detail, taking the opening 'Emerson' movement's impulsive and sometimes contradictory tempo modifications on faith. Countermelodies emerge in clear perspective alongside clotted chords. The pianist's care over slurred staccatos lends uncommon distinction to the passages in which they occur, while his unruffled command of the long chains of left-hand arpeggios conveys effortless sweep. Yet while Rangell doesn't match Brylewski's hyper-detailed control, he contrasts and characterises Ives's rapid changes from petulant outbursts to lyrical tenderness more convincingly. Similarly, Rangell hurls into the rapid runs and syncopations in 'Hawthorne' with the improvisatory

fervour one hears in Ives's own piano-playing on private discs, whereas Brylewski smooths out the edges, with every note in its exact place. In the central march, however, Rangell is rhythmically unsettled, while Brylewski's rigid accuracy pales next to Jeremy Denk's brisker, more idiomatic interpretation.

Rangell's fidgety sense of timing undermines moments of simplicity and repose in 'The Alcotts', as well as Ives's directives for when to press forward and hold back. Brylewski's well-calibrated balances and finger-based legato keep the music's spacious countenance at bay, in contrast to the more songfully inflected readings of Steven Mayer (Naxos) and Kirkpatrick (Sony). 'Thoreau' brings out the best in both pianists. Rangell beautifully taps into the movement's narrative swings, despite his cavalier adherence to Ives's time-tested dynamics (the 'echo' effects, for example, go for nothing). Brylewski allows the heavily scored broad passages enough room to resonate and makes an insidious transition into the first statement of the slow left-hand A-C-G ostinato (3'33" into the movement). Carolyn Ralser's lovely playing of the optional flute solo towards the end is miked at an appropriate distance, 'across Walden Pond', as it were. Rangell is the first and hopefully the last pianist on record to pucker his lips and whistle the flute part. Such cuteness cheapens one of Ives's most inspired moments.

If anything, Rangell's recreative intensity seems to merge more organically with his disc's other selections. He wrings more angularity and harmonic tension from Nielsen's imaginative Op 59 tryptich than anyone else on disc and gives shape and meaning to Enescu's gorgeous evocations of distant bells, while, I might add, taking Enescu's *pianissimos* more seriously than he does those of Ives! His arpeggiation of non-arpeggiated chords, though, seems mannered rather than purposeful. In comparison to relatively objective, 'by the book' renditions of Schoenberg's Op 33 from Pollini (DG, 6/88), Lubimov (Vista Vera) and Jacobs (Nonesuch), Rangell's interpretations are broader, more rhetorical and contrapuntally varied.

In short, the virtues and drawbacks of both *Concord* performances balance each other out. Neither, however, usurp Jeremy Denk's bold and brilliant reference version, out of print on CD but available via download. **Jed Distler**

Ives – selected comparisons:

Denk (11/10^{US}) (TDM) ➔ TDM2567

Kirkpatrick (SONY) ➔ 88875 06190-2

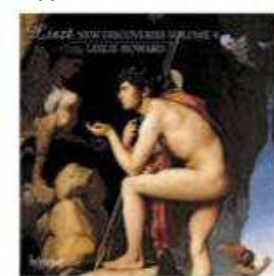
Mayer (NAXO) 8 559127

Liszt

'New Discoveries, Vol 4 – Rêves et fantaisies' Album-Leaves – 'An die Künstler I', S166t/1; 'An die Künstler II', S166t/2; 'Aus dem Mephisto-Walzer', S167m/2; 'Ave Maria', S164q; 'Dublin', S164r; 'Düsseldorf Preludio', S163f2. Bülow-Marsch, S229b. Danse des syphes de La damnation de Faust de Hector Berlioz, S474a. Dem Andenken Petőfi, S195ii. Den Schutz-Engeln (Angelus), S162a/1. Den Zypressen der Villa d'Este [i], S162b/1. Essai sur l'indifference, S692p/2. Hungarian Rhapsody No 23, 'Rêves et fantaisies', S242/23. Kavallerie-Geschwindmarsch, S460. Klavierstück, S692n. La lugubre gondola, S199a/ii. Largo, S692p/1. Maometto II de Rossini – Fantaisie, S421b. Preludio funebre, S205b

Leslie Howard *pf*

Hyperion © CDA68247 (75' • DDD)



This, incredibly, is the 100th CD of Liszt's music for solo piano recorded by the indefatigable Leslie Howard for Hyperion. (He has also, I note, recently recorded for another label Liszt's own transcriptions for two pianos of all 12 symphonic poems.) I wish I could say this fourth volume of new discoveries, subtitled 'Rêves et fantaisies', was a richly satisfying cornucopia of valuable and unexpected treasures but, frankly, it is not – though obviously an essential purchase for hardcore Lisztians and Howard completists.

All the recordings are believed to be world premieres. The majority of the 19 titles are first drafts, second drafts, alternative versions and suchlike that have already appeared on Howard's monumental series in their final garb, including five *Album-Leaves* (the shortest lasting 17 seconds, the longest 55) and two scraps of juvenilia (1'56" and 1'16" respectively). There is the first draft of the *Bülow-Marsch* (1883) which even Howard admits is 'the composer having a bad day at the office'. Of the other shortish works only the *Album-Leaf* 'Aus dem Mephisto-Walzer' (a stand-alone piece using material from the central section of the *Mephisto Waltz* No 1) and the *Kavallerie-Geschwindmarsch* (1870) are viable for recital, this latter described by Howard as 'full of amusement and delightful unimportance' and 'the single most elusive publication from Liszt's lifetime'. He makes of it a cheerfully effective encore.

The two longer works here will ultimately tip you towards a purchase

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Beguiling intimacy: Kevin Kenner reveals his affection for Paderewski

(or not): *Maometto II de Rossini* is a substantial (8'34") section of an unfinished operatic fantasy based, I learn, on 'Risponda a te primiero', the chorus from Act 1 of the opera. This is the virtuoso Liszt (it was written in 1839 and certainly gives the pianist and his septuagenarian fingers a challenging work out) but I question if this 'marvellous torso' (Howard) is marvellous enough to earn the affection of pianists. The same must be said for the opening item of the disc, which is in effect the *Hungarian Rhapsody* No 23 (1847). Only recently published, at 21'54" it is the longest by a country mile of Liszt's essays in *modus hungarica*. Its meandering course and lack of memorable thematic material put it outside the canon for this listener, but let not that detract from a superbly played (and researched) addition to this extraordinary artist's legacy.

Jeremy Nicholas

Paderewski

Humoresques de concert, Op 14. Dans le désert (Toccata), Op 15. Miscellanea, Op 16 - No 2, Mélodie; No 4, Nocturne. Piano Sonata, Op 21

Kevin Kenner *pf*

Fryderyk Chopin institute © NIFCCD057 (70' • DDD)



There are at least three good reasons for investing in this fine recording. First, there is the prospect of hearing 10 of Paderewski's best works for solo piano played on his own instrument (albeit not the one at which he would have composed any of them, for these date from 1885 to 1903 and the piano is a 1925 Hamburg Steinway Model D). It is in excellent voice, with a more mellow upper register than we are used to today but with the familiar resonant growling bass.

Second, there is the inclusion of Paderewski's Op 15, officially titled *Dans le désert: Tableau musical en forme d'une toccata*, which I for one have never encountered before. It was written in 1887 and at 9'06" is over twice the length of any of the other eight short works here. While it must surely have been recorded before, I can find none currently available. It is highly virtuoso with most appealing ideas. Its neglect is puzzling.

Third, and most persuasively, there is the playing of Kevin Kenner, hardly

a high-profile name despite his successes in both the 1990 Chopin and Tchaikovsky competitions (second and third prizes respectively). His approach to Paderewski's music reveals long acquaintance and great affection, with beautifully judged rubato and a beguiling intimacy that illuminate in the best possible light all six *Humoresques de concert*, Op 14 (of which the once-ubiquitous Minuet in G is the first) and two from the seven *Série de morceaux*, Op 16; these, Melody (No 2) and Nocturne (No 4), are ravishingly played. Is the piano placed too distantly in the sound picture? Perhaps, but it allows the Steinway to truly sing and breathe.

The cherry on top is Kenner's performance of the Sonata in E flat minor (1903), Paderewski's greatest and most important work for solo piano. Here Kenner has serious competition from Jonathan Plowright, today's leading champion of the composer, whose 2006 recording was rightly praised. I think Kenner trumps even Plowright, despite his omission of the first-movement repeat. The last movement, a scintillating and technically challenging toccata, is articulated with thrilling clarity and élan.

Altogether this is a piano disc – let alone a Paderewski recital – to treasure.

Jeremy Nicholas

Piano Sonata – selected comparison:

Plowright (12/07) (HYPE) CDA67562

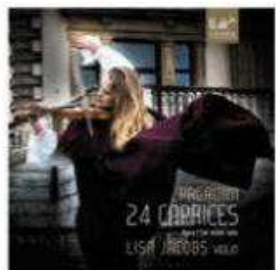
Paganini

Caprices, Op 1

Lisa Jacobs *vn*

Cobra © (two discs for the price of one)

COBRA0064 (87' • DDD)



It was surely only a matter of time before the Dutch violinist Lisa Jacobs recorded

Paganini, after the assured, personality-rich account she gave in 2016 of the concertos of Paganini's Baroque violin virtuoso forebear, Pietro Locatelli. What she's come up with here is a strong offering, too: distinctiveness again, within an overall approach that sits mostly on the gentler, beautiful-toned end of the scale, as her bouncing, mellow-toned No 1 sets up. Although not entirely, as you'll hear through the peasantry fire she brings to No 5. Also worth highlighting is the thought-through clarity of her part-voicing: returning to No 1, listen to the extent to which its lower-note melody feels like a sustained musical line, then compare that to Roman Simovic's recent reading, which rather hides this melody in places, exciting and fast-feeling though his short, sharp ricocheting is.

Tempo-wise, Jacobs occupies roughly the same comfortable, instinctive-feeling ball park as other recent recordings have done, achieving the desired impressions of speed and space without plunging into extremes. Indeed, measure and subtlety are among these readings' chief overall qualities. Take the sombre No 4 in C minor: opening pure-toned, vibrato present but by no means throbbing heavily, where she trusts the *forte* marking of those low-register octave interjections to emerge naturally without too much additional pressure from herself. Other pleasures are the whisperiest *pianissimo* she brings to the start of 'The Trill', No 6, and the sophisticated mini-swells she brings in No 24 to the second variation's acciaccatura'd semiquaver groupings, making them sound like little flicks of an impish devil's tail.

I suspect that if it's beauty I'm after then Ehnes will still come out on top for me; the cleanly ringing purity of his sound and the sheer finesse of his technique are just too good, and are also the perfect contrast to

the Perlman sitting in my back pocket for when I fancy a bit of living life dangerously. That said, I also suspect I will yet be revisiting Jacobs when I fancy beauty of a slightly softer hue. **Charlotte Gardner**

Selected comparisons:

Perlman (6/72^R) (WARN) 2564 61303-4

Ehnes (1/10) ONYX ONYX4044

Frederic Lamond

'The Liszt Recordings & HMV &

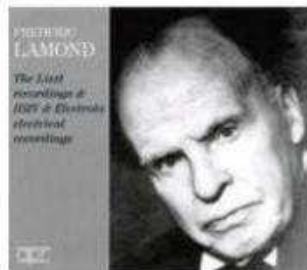
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Frederic Lamond *pf*

APR © ③ APR7310 (3h 58' • ADD)

Recorded 1919-41



Of Liszt's pupils, the Scottish pianist Frederic Lamond (1868-1948) was

survived only by José Vianna da Motta, who died a few months later the same year. A stalwart and reverent player, Lamond is often cited as the foremost exponent of Beethoven after Hans von Bülow and before Artur Schnabel. One of his favourite and most successful programmes consisted of the *Hammerklavier* to open, followed by Opp 110 and 111, and concluded with the *Waldstein* and *Appassionata*. This three-disc APR set, including both acoustic and electrical recordings made between 1919 and 1941 is, to the best of my knowledge, the most comprehensive survey of Lamond yet to appear.

Taken as a whole, these performances throw open a window to a bygone era, revealing a musician less prone to what our modern ears might consider the wilful affectations of pianists like Hambourg or Paderewski. Yet Lamond is unmistakably himself, with a strong point of view unambiguously expressed in everything he plays. Interestingly, for those Liszt pieces he recorded more than once over a period of decades, his interpretation remains remarkably consistent. And, listening to Lamond's powerfully cohesive, expressive Beethoven sonatas, one can easily imagine the fascination he held for the public.

Andrew Hallifax and Bryan Crimp's transfers face some stiff competition in the 2013 two-disc set 'Rare Broadcasts and Selected Recordings' from Marston. That said, this is a compendium no one interested in performance practice or the history of piano-playing will want to miss. Highly recommended.

Patrick Rucker

'Memory'

Chopin Mazurka No 13, Op 17 No 4. Nocturne No 19, Op 72 No 1. Waltz No 3, Op 34 No 2

Debussy Arabesque No 1. La plus que lente.

Rêverie. Suite bergamasque – Clair de lune **Satie**

Gnossiennes – No 1; No 4. Gymnopedie No 1.

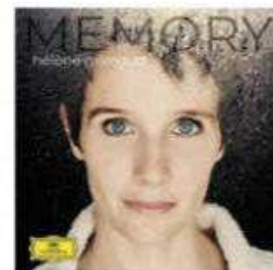
Pièces froides, Book 2 – No 1, En y regardant à

deux fois; No 2, Passer **Sawhney** Breathing Light

Silvestrov Bagatelles – No 1; No 2

Hélène Grimaud *pf*

DG © 483 5710GH; © ④ 483 5358GH (52' • DDD)



Remember Lang Lang's DG release entitled 'Memory' (7/06), mostly centred

around repertoire evocative of childhood recollections? Hélène Grimaud's latest DG release is also called 'Memory'. In her case the subtext is mindfulness. But you don't need booklet notes to understand the care and intelligence with which these short and introspective works are programmed and performed.

A bagatelle by Valentin Silvestrov provides a gentle, almost hesitant opening that dovetails easily into Debussy's *Arabesque* No 1. The Debussy's sunny E major tonality contrasts with another brooding Silvestrov bagatelle in E minor. Its dark, rolling left-hand accompaniment, in turn, relates to that in Satie's *Gnossienne* No 4, where Grimaud's phrasing of the evocative right-hand melody takes on a shimmering, disembodied aura. She retains this fragile and austere sound world at the start of Chopin's E minor Op 72 Nocturne, releasing its turbulent undertones in gradual increments. She adapts a similar interpretative plan for Chopin's Mazurka, Op 17 No 4, and Debussy's *La plus que lente*, ranging from veiled understatement to aching intensity. In the case of the Mazurka, however, Grimaud's dynamic build-up in the coda seems forced and unnatural, not emerging from what came before.

In contrast to the push/pull rubato of Satie's *Gnossienne* No 1, Grimaud makes the famous *Gymnopedie* No 1's interpretative points through colour and touch alone. Although Chopin's A minor Waltz veers on the slow and episodic, Grimaud's textural richness and sustained phrasing compensate. She plays the hackneyed 'Clair de lune' with simplicity, proportion and ravishing nuance, while *Rêverie*'s fullness of tone fills the room more so than in the work's typical cameo-oriented readings. As for the final selection, I find this solo-piano version of



Soft-hued beauty: Lisa Jacobs finds expressive subtlety in Paganini's fearsome Caprices

Nitin Sawhney's *Breathing Light* far more appealing and artistically fulfilling than in the rather cheesy quasi-New Age arrangement I stumbled upon via YouTube.

I may offend Grimaud's artistic vision by saying this disc is perfect for calm background music or a massage session. Yet when you pull up a comfy chair in a quiet room and listen to this disc with concentration and undivided attention, you'll be well rewarded. **Jed Distler**

'Rarities of Piano Music 2017'

Amirow Ten Miniatures^a – Nocturne; Lullaby
Babadjanian Elegy^b **Bellini/Thalberg** Fantasy on 'Casta diva'^c **Blagoy** Fairy Tale Sonata^d
Chasins Prelude, Op 12 No 2^e **Chopin** Nouvelle Étude No 1 (arr Godowsky/Hamelin)^f **Czerny** Variations on 'La ricordanza'^g **Desyatnikov** Rondo-Chase^h **Dolina/Ziegler** El vals del duende^a **Drozdow** Scherzo-Valse^b **G Dupont** Après-midi de dimancheⁱ **Grainger** Irish Tune from County Derry^e **JW Green** Body and Soul (arr Wild/Berman)^e **Hamelin** Toccata on 'L'homme armé'^f **Hindemith** Ludus tonalis^h – Interludes Nos 4 & 9; Fugue No 5 **Levitzki** Arabesque valsante, Op 6^d **Poulenc** Les chemins de l'amour (arr Pompa-Baldi)^g **Wagner** Elegie, WWV93^h

^eDaniel Berman, ^aMisha Dacič, ^hLukas Geniušas, ^fMarc-André Hamelin, ^dVincenzo Maltempo, ⁱÉmile Naoumoff, ^aSatu Paavola, ^gAntonio Pompa-Baldi, ^bNadejda Vlaeva, ^{pf}

Danacord © DACOCD799 (79' • DDD)
 Recorded live at Schloss vor Husum,
 August 18-26, 2017



This year's disc of highlights from last year's 31st Husum Festival (2017)

showcases nine pianists playing the works of some 20 composers. The joy of these annual compilations is not the geekish delight of comparing the tempo and phrasing of one pianist's Beethoven slow movement with the performance of the same movement by another pianist, but of delving into the bottomless and inexhaustible treasure trove of the piano's literature. It is for some mysterious reason – made even more mysterious now by the easy access online to virtually any score – one that is still explored by only a small proportion of the professional pianistic community.

So let us salute those who think outside the box and have been invited to Husum to reveal those discoveries that have excited them. Pianists like the brilliant Italian-American Antonio Pompa-Baldi, who opened his recital with Czerny's *La ricordanza* Variations, made famous (though slightly abbreviated) by Vladimir Horowitz. What a daring choice with which to open a recital – but here it is in all its frothy,

dancing, bubbling gaiety, the prelude to an outstanding recital which included Pompa-Baldi's own transcription of Poulenc's *Les chemins de l'amour*. Here, too, is the great Marc-André Hamelin playing his completion of a recently discovered unfinished Chopin-Godowsky study (the *Nouvelle étude* No 1 in F minor), and his own quite fearsomely challenging Toccata on *L'homme armé*, commissioned as the set piece for the 2017 Van Cliburn International Competition.

I urge you to hear the young Russian-Lithuanian Lukas Geniušas in excerpts from a riveting – and, for this listener, revelatory – performance of Hindemith's *Ludus tonalis*. Old-school charm and tonal finesse come from Husum veteran Daniel Berman. In fact the only performance here below par is Satu Paavola's stultifyingly dull rendering of Thalberg's Fantasy (so-called) on 'Casta diva'.

This year's selection has, for a change, a booklet (candid, charming and in occasionally idiosyncratic English) by the disc's co-producer Jesper Buhl. As he says – and as this disc vividly demonstrates – 'Husum is the perfect antidote for the jaded keyboard palette'. **Jeremy Nicholas**

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Peter Dickinson

Arnold Whittall profiles the English composer whose music bridges all manner of gaps in a positive embrace of diversity

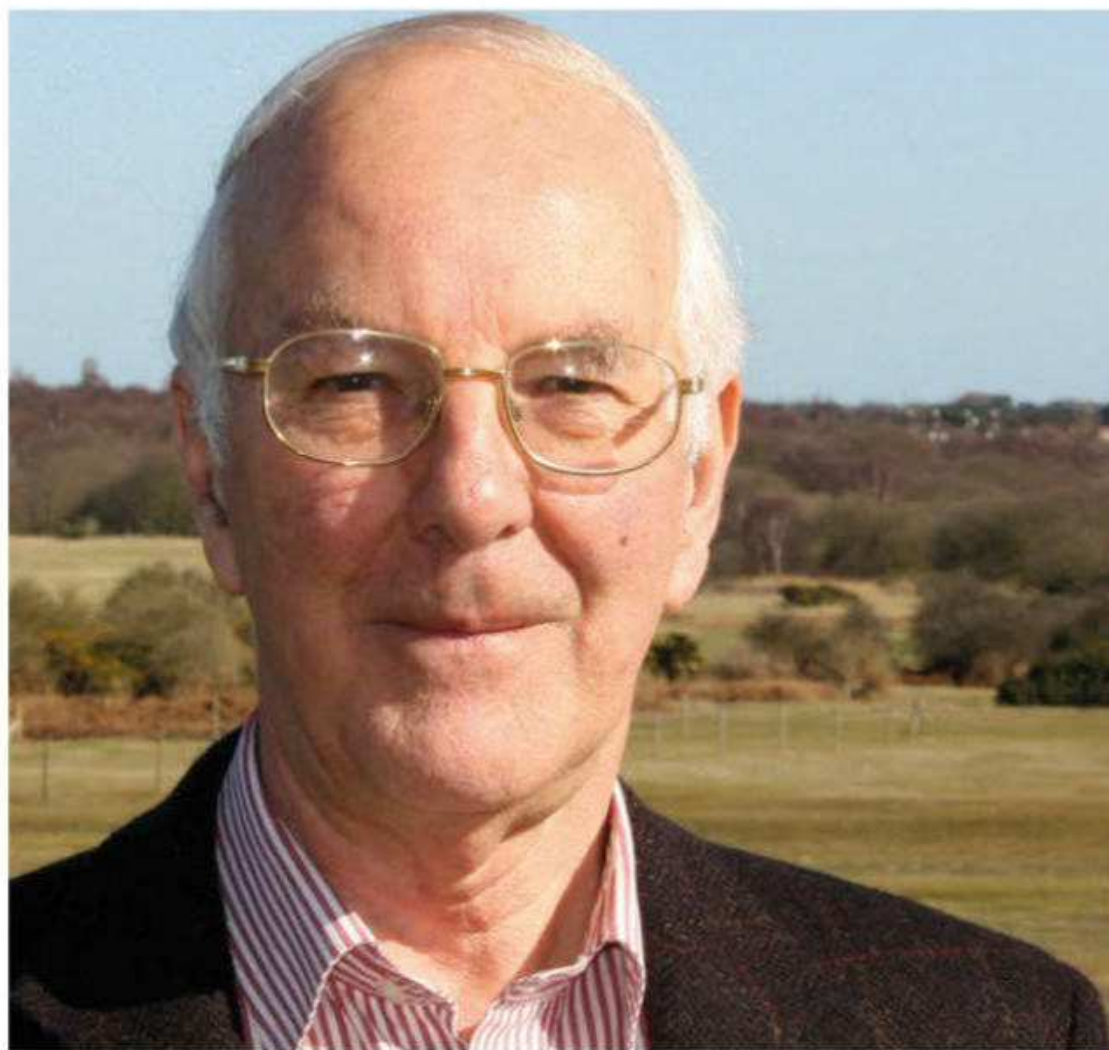
A month after Peter Dickinson's 80th birthday, *Gramophone* released a podcast (December 15, 2014) of a discussion between him and James Jolly which was printed in Dickinson's latest book, *Words and Music* (Boydell Press: 2016). Reviewing *Words and Music* in these pages (3/18), Richard Whitehouse endorsed Dickinson's own suggestion that his concertos for organ (1971), piano (1984) and violin (1986) (all now featuring on the same CD) 'constitute his most important large-scale achievement and exemplify that resourceful integration of high art and vernacular elements which will likely prove his most enduring legacy'.

This pinpoints the bracing effect of Dickinson's music in which allusions to the worlds of jazz or popular song can unobtrusively enhance those features of the 'serious' symphonic tradition that still predominate. Until recently, developments in the arts have often been seen by historians as exploring a single, crucial polarity – conservation versus innovation, qualities primarily associated with composers, painters, poets and all kinds of artistic creators. But a rather

His modulating between styles is a model that allows for many different kinds of transformations and confrontations

different polarity – populist versus elitist – is gaining favour today, and this shifts the emphasis from creators to consumers; from the considered concepts of artists to the instinctive preferences of audiences. In former times, audience members might be broadly categorised as highbrow, middlebrow or lowbrow, according to background and musical taste. Today, even the most experienced music critics are less confident about making such distinctions – especially when the elitist associations of 'highbrow' are no longer seen as automatically superior to the populist implications of 'lowbrow': and Dickinson's music shows a comparable willingness to question the usefulness of such distinctions in the modern age.

In his review of *Words and Music*, Whitehouse follows up a cue from one of Dickinson's most important pieces of writing when he describes a music 'modulating between styles' – 'high art' at one extreme, 'vernacular' at the other: a model allowing for many different kinds of transformations and confrontations. In Dickinson's music such strategies reflect the spirit of Ives's bracingly radical assertion: 'Why tonality as such should be thrown out for good I can't see. Why it should always be present, I can't see.' Ives is the most senior of the modernist pioneers valued by Dickinson. But respect for things Ivesian



Dickinson resourcefully integrates high art and vernacular elements

has always been complemented by the less expansive (but no less challenging) spirit of Satie – a conjunction possible because both Ives and Satie converged on a regard for the humanising immediacy of popular music, whether hymns, musical hall songs or the 'swung' qualities of ragtime, blues and (for Dickinson) the piano miniatures of Billy Mayerl.

From his earliest extant compositions, now well represented on disc, Dickinson has drawn strength from such well-varied contexts. When this Cambridge organ scholar graduated in the mid-1950s he might have been expected to move smoothly into a career as a cathedral organist and choirmaster, and a provider of church music in the Anglican tradition. That was not to be. But nor did Dickinson's relish for the very un-English life of New York City while a graduate student at the Juilliard School lead to the kind of career mixing concert music, film scoring and jazz pianism which Sir Richard Rodney Bennett (two years his junior) would adopt a little later on. If Dickinson had stayed in America his openness to the experimentalism of Cage and his circle might have led to something as radical as Cage's Satie-derived *Cheap Imitation* (1969). But Dickinson's own *Satie Transformations* (1969-70), which, as the composer has said, 'brings together straight and jazzed versions of material deriving from Satie's *Gnossiennes*', shows that working within a more mainstream environment than Ives or Cage can still produce sparkling and spontaneously expressive results.

Dickinson's involvement in the rapidly expanding higher-education sector in Britain after 1960 stimulated the exploration of genres with a degree of community involvement, and what has proved to be his most substantial work, a 75-minute musical drama for student forces called *The Judas Tree* (1965), built around a text by Thomas Blackburn, fitted with the tendency to move 'music theatre' away from the opera house, as Britten and others were doing at the time. The survival of a (1967) recording of *The Judas Tree* from Washington National Cathedral, rather than from Canterbury



DICKINSON FACTS

1934 Born November 15 in Lytham St Annes, Lancashire

1953-61 Organ scholar at Queens' College Cambridge; graduate studies at the Juilliard School in New York

1962-66 Staff member at teacher training college in London. Compositions include *The Judas Tree*

1966-70 Staff Tutor, extramural department of Birmingham University. Compositions include *Satie Transformations*

1974-84 Professor of music in new department at Keele University. Establishes Centre for American Music. Compositions include String Quartet No 2, Piano Concerto

1991-97 Chair of music at Goldsmiths College, University of London

1997-2004 Head of music, Institute of United States Studies, University of London

Dickinson on music today

'The fertilisation of one kind of music with another and the incorporation of them into a new stylistic homogeneity is fascinating and positive. That's the way life is and it's what we're doing' (interview with James Jolly, in *Words and Music*)

or York, neatly pinpoints that degree of distancing from more local musical traditions that has remained a distinctive Dickinson feature down the years. Despite his progression through increasingly senior academic positions at the universities of Birmingham, Keele and London (Goldsmiths), his activities as performer, composer and writer signalled a pragmatic flair for fresh ways of responding constructively (which does not mean uncritically) to the kind of burgeoning stand-offs between elitism and populism to be found at their most elaborate in the concertos and the String Quartet No 2 (1975).

The repertoire included on the various recordings issued and reissued over the past few years fills out the coverage of how Dickinson has used vernacular allusions to give fresh point and purpose to those 'high art' qualities always at the heart of his musical language – qualities that acknowledge the example of his mentor Lennox Berkeley. Though comparable in some respects to Robin Holloway and David Matthews, and foreshadowing the likes of Mark-Anthony Turnage and Tansy Davies, Dickinson has shown resourceful commitment to his own special musical contexts, and two works from the 1980s are particularly memorable in this respect.

The Violin Concerto was written in memory of Ralph Holmes, a violinist with whom Dickinson often performed, and analogies with Berg's concerto-as-instrumental-requiem are far from irrelevant. Dickinson offers notably edgy perspectives not just on Beethoven's *Spring* Sonata (transformed at one point into a 1930s-style pop song) but also on the complex feelings of sadness and warmth that arise in remembering a valued colleague. *Larkin's Jazz* (1989) is a more detached yet still affectionate tribute to a popular poet

(Philip Larkin) whose musical preferences were refreshingly downbeat. Here Dickinson transforms what might have been a traditional kind of song cycle – four settings for baritone and instrumental ensemble often evoking the jazz of Sidney Bechet and King Oliver – into a continuous structure with 11 sections that involve speech as well as song. As the composer describes it, 'Each poem has a prelude; then the poem itself is spoken to a minimal musical background; and that is followed by an instrumental commentary' – to which a wordless baritone line may be added.

If the Walton/Sitwell *Facade* was an early demonstration of how the formidable Schoenbergian template of *Pierrot lunaire* could be moved away from expressionistic melodrama towards cabaret-style entertainment without losing all contact with 'serious' musical content, *Larkin's Jazz* made a no less imaginative advance in generic rethinking decades later. And there are plenty of other Dickinson works that merit close attention. Mezzo-soprano Meriel Dickinson has recorded the strongly shaped early set of Auden songs (1956), along with other vocal works, for Albany, and a recording of the eloquently concentrated Violin Sonata (1961), written in America, is in the pipeline. But the concertos and *Larkin's Jazz* convey the essence of the Dickinson idiom, avoiding extravagance and overstatement yet offering challenging superimpositions and juxtapositions that rarely settle into predictable, conventionally integrated modes of expression. With its direct, unfussy manner and positive embrace of diversity and even instability, this music epitomises crucial aspects of contemporary sensibility. If listeners today are still happy to categorise themselves as predominantly highbrow, middlebrow or lowbrow, Dickinson's music has much to offer all of them. **G**

RECORDINGS OF DICKINSON

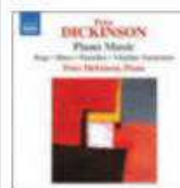
Style-modulation in action in a wide range of genres

**Mass of the Apocalypse. Larkin's Jazz**

Various artists

Naxos (6/10)

This selection of vocal and instrumental works centres on the telling contrast between the highly dramatic Mass (juxtaposing the liturgy with the Book of Revelation) and the secular world of Philip Larkin's poetry (spoken rather than sung, but given musical backing and commentary evoking jazz legend Sidney Bechet).

**Piano Music**

Peter Dickinson *pf*

Naxos (2/12)

Spanning the near half-century from 1957 to 2004, this is the composer's own definitive compilation of pieces that highlight his fascination with how such genres as ragtime and blues can comfortably and occasionally provocatively coexist with the more sober qualities of classical concert music.

**Three Concertos**

Chloë Hanslip *vn* Howard Shelley *pf* Jennifer Bate *org*

BBC SO / David Atherton; BBC NOW / Clark Rundell

Heritage (1/15)

All three concertos ring ear-teasing changes on generic conventions, with the soloists questioning their independence from the orchestra as consistently as they ponder connections and disconnections between classical and popular styles. The disc also includes the Beatles-inspired *Merseyside Echoes*.

Vocal



Mark Pullinger listens to Janáček from the late Jiří Bělohlávek:

'Bělohlávek gets under the skin of this music, drawing out its folk roots and speech rhythms, and its sheer humanity' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 80**



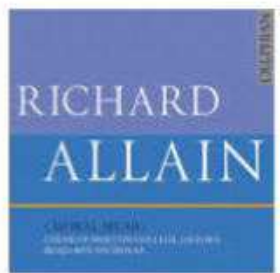
Andrew Achenbach takes a very English walk with Ivor Gurney:

'Sarah Connolly teams up with Tenebrae to give a performance of breathtaking composure and atmosphere' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 87**

Allain

The Beloved. Cana's Guest. Don't you weep when I am gone. God be in my head. If music be the food of love. The Lord reigns (Psalm 93). The Magi's Gifts. The Norwich Service. O Day-spring. A Perfect Friend. A Prayer of St Richard of Chichester. Videte miraculum. Welcome, all wonders

Choir of Merton College, Oxford / Benjamin Nicholas with **Alex Little, Tom Fetherstonhaugh** *org* **Finn McEwan** *ssax*
Delphian © DCD34207 (64' • DDD • T/t)



Half of the tracks on this splendid disc are premiere recordings. For his texts the

English composer Richard Allain (b1965) has selected widely, ranging from the Psalms, through the Sarum Primer of 1538 to Crawshaw, Shakespeare, RL Stevenson and his brother, the poet Thomas Allain. His approach to word-setting is always acutely responsive, bringing a welcome freshness to classic verses as well as standards such as *If music be the food of love* (2015) and the 'Norwich' Evening Canticles. These latter pieces provide some of the most arresting music on the disc, especially the ecstatic organ part in the *Magnificat* and the intense baritone solo from Patrick Keefe in the *Nunc dimittis*. The richest harmonic palette is reserved for the gorgeous wedding anthem *Cana's Guest*, Allain's most-performed work, which unfurls with a spellbinding intensity, and the daring treatment of the spiritual *Don't you weep*.

A preponderance of slow unaccompanied music allows the listener to luxuriate in and enjoy the core strength of Benjamin Nicholas's Merton College choir, with its solid bass section and sufficient choral weight to cope with the wide dynamic range that so much of Allain's music demands. Finn McEwan's soprano saxophone comes as a pleasant timbral addition in the Advent antiphon

O Day-spring and I also enjoyed the nod towards Fauré in the delicious *A Prayer of St Richard of Chichester* for two-part upper voices and organ.

Of all the music recorded here, the 14-minute *Videte miraculum* (a reworking of Tallis's piece of the same name) is the only piece which seems over-long, which cannot be said of the disc's final track, *The Lord reigns* (taken from a longer nine-movement *Vespers* of 2011). Its rhythmically vigorous concision rounds off a stimulating and beautifully sung collection, which connoisseurs of the great British choral heritage should rush to buy.

Malcolm Riley

JS Bach

'Secular Cantatas, Vol 10 - Cantatas of Contentment'

Cantatas - No 30a, Angenehmes Wiederau, freue dich in deinen Auen^a; No 204, Ich bin in mir vergnügt^b

^{ab}**Carolyn Sampson** *sop* ^a**Robin Blaze** *counterten*

^a**Makoto Sakurada** *ten* ^a**Dominik Wörner** *bass*

Bach Collegium Japan / Masaaki Suzuki

BIS © BIS2351 (66' • DDD/DSD • T/t)



This release represents the end of an era, and not just the end of Bach Collegium

Japan's long-running series of all the sacred and secular cantatas which launched in 1995 like a shining bolt from the east. Masaaki Suzuki began his voyage at a time when Ton Koopman was embarking on his equivalent project, and with John Eliot Gardiner continuing a series for DG soon to become subsumed by his Pilgrimage over the course of the Millennial year. And – lest one forget – the hit-and-miss, budget complete recordings under Pieter Jan Leusink on Brilliant Classics were also in full swing. The partnership of BIS (namely Robert von Bahr) and BCJ could indeed be one of the very last recording investments of

this nature and length in the modern digital era.

We celebrate it here with many of Suzuki's finest qualities of expressive lucidity, unforced coherence and the quiet nobility of one serving the music as the most natural of reflexes. Cantata No 30a is a welcome serenata (to the new 'landlord, liege and judge' of the district) formed of five exquisite arias and framed by a buoyantly direct chorus. The cantata appears 15 or so years later as a sacred parody for the feast of St John the Baptist ('Freue dich') – a superb example of Bach's uncanny ability to recast material and effortlessly shape it afresh without suspicion of previous provenance.

With all the soloists taking their turn to praise the incumbent, Dominik Wörner does so with rather less of the nonchalant fluidity and resonance of his seasoned predecessor Peter Kooij. However, Robin Blaze – representing the allegory of 'good fortune' – lightly glides through his picture of unequivocal goodwill with customary panache. Most consistently satisfying in the secular volumes has been Suzuki's radiant instrumental contributions, affording these works a kind of genial 'outdoors' sensibility, perhaps most striking of all in Vol 8 (Nos 206 and 215 – 8/17).

Carolyn Sampson's ever-inspiring contributions close the project with *Ich bin in mir vernügt*, a little-known solo soprano cantata compared to the Nos 51, 199 and 210s of this world. While the text is decidedly prolix, Bach's dogged transformational instincts provide the kind of liquid vocalisation upon which Sampson thrives. Just when one thought it impossible to hear Bach sung any better than in her recent performance of No 105 (arr Schumann – Ondine, 8/18), she brings an Arcadian coloration to 'Meine Seele sei vernügt', placing her among the finest exponents on record of this composer's peerlessly demanding soprano-writing.

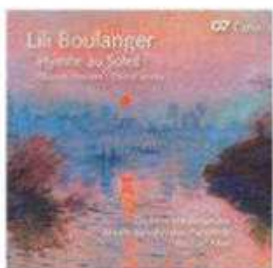
Jonathan Freeman-Attwood



The Choir of Merton College, Oxford, under Benjamin Nicholas luxuriate in the harmonic palette of Richard Allain's music

L Boulanger

Cortège. D'un jardin clair. D'un vieux jardin. Hymne au Soleil^a. Pendant la tempête^a. Pour les funérailles d'un soldat^a. Prelude in D flat. Psaume XXIV^a. Renouveau^a. Les Sirènes^a. Soir sur la plaine^a. La source^a. Sous-bois^a. Soleils de septembre^a. Vieille prière bouddhique^a
^aOrpheus Vocal Ensemble / Michael Alber with Antonii Baryshevskyi *pf*
 Carus © CARUS83 489 (79' • DDD • T/t)



Evoking spaces and possibly rituals well beyond the shores of Europe within its

three minutes, the D flat piano Prelude sets the tone for an album of mystery and enchantment that by and large makes a persuasive case for Lili Boulanger as one of the significant might-have-beens in post-Romantic French music. Without undue washes of pedal but aided by a fairly enveloping acoustic, the pianist Antonii Baryshevskyi also offers limpid support to a German ensemble of professional voices in the album's significant premiere on record, *Soleils de septembre*. Their diction overcomes a backward microphone placing, and their tenors, in consort, have

the right nasal, slightly pinched tone for the idiom.

Standout solos are more variable but I enjoyed Sonja Buhler's vibrant, forwardly projected soprano to introduce another of the composer's extended poetic settings from 1911-12, *Soir sur la plaine*. Light and landscape prick Boulanger's imagination; and when she moves on from the technique of clusters and pedal-points that bring distant Asia to mind in the way of Ravel's *Shéhérazade*, she can also spin a voluptuous melody, clouded with Wagnerian chromatics as well as progressions inherited from her teacher Fauré in the case of *Les Sirènes*.

By and large, as I said: four of these pieces were conceived with a full-orchestral texture, and for all his skill Baryshevskyi is no match for the drums and sarrusophone that lend so noble a tread to the extended obsequy *Pour les funérailles d'un soldat* – also predating the Great War – or the brassy, hieratic splendour of late works such as the *Vieille prière bouddhique* and setting of Psalm 24. To these better-known and more distinctive examples of Boulanger's craft, Igor Markevitch (EMI, 8/92 – nla) and John Eliot Gardiner (DG, 11/02) bring unrivalled vigour and authority.

Peter Quantrill

R Dale

'Requiem for my Mother'

Materna Requiem^a. When Music Sounds^b

^aLouise Alder, ^bNazan Fikret *sop* ^aTrystan *ten*

^aHannah Dienes-Williams, ^aEdward Hyde *trebs*

^aKantos Chamber Choir; ^bThe Cantus Ensemble;

^aRoyal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra / Clark

Rundell; ^bThe Studio Orchestra / Jeff Atmajian

Decca © 483 4076DH (73' • DDD • T)



Rebecca Dale's debut album arrives with much fanfare and publicity, with her

new label proclaiming that she is 'the first female composer to sign to Decca Classics'. (Decca, where have you been?) In the face of such assertive public promotion, it is perhaps somewhat ironic that the main work on display here is, in the composer's own words, 'a very personal piece'. Dale's mother died in 2010. Writing the *Materna Requiem* thus served a cathartic function. The work was also a way for Dale to build a bridge back to her mother.

Couched in a highly accessible language, *Materna Requiem* is likely to build further bridges for the composer, especially among Classic FM listeners. One need look no

further than the Requiem's main theme. Heard for the first time a minute or so into the Introit, a slowly rising modally inflected melody moves against a steadily falling line in the bass. The theme reappears throughout the work, functioning as yet another musical bridge. Echoes of the consonant choral style of Eric Whitacre, Paul Mealor and Patrick Hawes are never far away, often appearing alongside rhythmic bursts of energy and colourful splashes of sound one associates with the film soundtracks of John Williams and Howard Shore.

Perhaps Dale's masterstroke is that she manages to blend these two elements. Unsurprisingly for a composer whose main commissions up until now have been for film and TV, there's a strong visual quality to the music throughout, also heard in the other work on this disc, the more overtly programmatic *When Music Sounds*. If Verdi's Requiem is operatic in its visual power, Dale's is predominantly filmic. It might be going a step too far to describe the *Materna Requiem* as a soundtrack to a film that doesn't exist; but whether it will stand the test of time, as Verdi's Requiem has done, remains to be seen. **Pwyll ap Siôn**

H Goodall

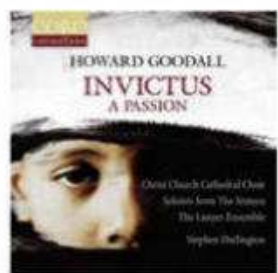
Invictus: A Passion

Kirsty Hopkins *sop* **Mark Dobell** *ten*

Christ Church Cathedral Choir;

Lanyer Ensemble / Stephen Darlington

Coro Connections © COR16165 (58' • DDD • T/t)



Invictus draws its title from the poem by William Ernest Henley, one of

the poets whose words are scattered throughout the nine movements of this fresh look at the Passion of Christ by Howard Goodall, in which women predominate in his choice of texts. The earliest of them is Æmelia Lanyer, a contemporary of Shakespeare's, and it is her version of Christ's last days, rather than the gospel account, that threads through the narrative, looking afresh at such familiar scenes as the trial of Christ before Pontius Pilate, where we hear Pilate's wife pleading for mercy for the prisoner. The fourth movement, 'Compassion', is inspired by the extraordinary life of Irena Sendler, a Polish nurse who, during the Second World War, rescued thousands of children from the Warsaw Ghetto; and the second, 'Lamentation', is an account by Frances Ellen Watkins Harper of a slave auction of children written in 1854. These testaments

of man's inhumanity to man are thrown into relief by the power of the human spirit to rise above circumstance, the theme of 'Invictus' and the conclusion of this work.

Goodall approaches the challenge of this diverse writing in the manner in which he is universally celebrated: as a composer who is unashamedly in love with music's abiding values of melody and harmony. The opening movement wears its heart on its sleeve, with the tenor's joyous cries of 'Gethsemane' ringing out above the ensemble. The tenor, Mark Dobell, catches the idiom admirably, couched between English choral tradition and West End musical. He is entirely believable with his fervent delivery of the lines 'I am the master of my fate / I am the captain of my soul' from 'Invictus' and in his boyish enthusiasm in Goodall's gospel-style setting of Yeats's 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree'. He takes command too in 'Easter Hymn', a poem by AE Housman, where his solo could well have stood alone.

Soprano Kirsty Hopkins, most true in timbre, is very touching in the setting of Christina Rossetti's 'Song of Mary Magdalene', her gorgeous voice endearingly caressing Goodall's lovely new setting of 'When I survey the wondrous Cross' with which this movement concludes. Her other main solo is the slave 'Lamentation', a shade less inspired as a setting, the title more in evidence in the heartfelt introduction on piano and cello, poignantly realised by Clive Driskill-Smith and Jane Fenton.

Other members of the Lanyer Ensemble include two string quartets, two horns, double bass and soprano saxophone, often introducing each movement in a solo role and adding colour and spice under conductor Stephen Darlington's watchful eye. Goodall's scoring is luminous and expertly fashioned, though some may find the saxophone too close for comfort (though not out of keeping within the idiom of the music). Darlington has long been an unassailed interpreter of Goodall's music, his Christ Church Choir a loyal custodian. I felt the Latin text in 'Compassion', led by treble Daniel Kelly, required clearer enunciation, and in those passages where the voices are in full cry and where the inspiration stutters momentarily a steadier tempo would have brought the text into closer focus.

Nevertheless, one cannot but fail to be moved by a work that wears its heart so openly on its sleeve. **Adrian Edwards**

Gorzanis

La barca del mio amore

La Lyra / Bor Zuljan *lute/gtr*

Arcana © A450 (57' • DDD • T/t)



Modern guitarists and listeners will be most familiar with the music of blind

Apulian lutenist and composer Giacomo Gorzanis (c1530-c1575) through the arrangements of the 19th-century Italian musicologist Oscar Chilesotti and others. In more recent times, Gorzanis's lute music has appeared in recitals by such modern masters of the lute as Jakob Lindberg. This extraordinary release is, however, perhaps the first to bring Gorzanis's instrumental and vocal music so comprehensively to life. Colourful, imaginative arrangements for an ensemble comprising lutes, guitar, colascione, gamba, dulcimer and percussion of some of Gorzanis's songs and dances are interspersed with lute solos and songs merely with lute or gamba accompaniment.

The ensemble is the Slovenian early music band La Lyra. The vocalist is the Puglian tenor and actor Pino De Vittorio. Overseeing proceedings as artistic director is the protean lutenist and guitarist Bor Zuljan. Together they not so much make music as smash the joint, such is the extrovert nature of the bulk of the songs, regardless of whether the singer is complaining about a deceptive procuress or bragging about the conquest of a 'pink-cheeked, rotund maid'.

The programme opens deceptively morosely, with 'Da che si part'il sol', a wretched lover's lament. But things heat up pretty quickly, with scathing saltarellos and vituperative villanellas tumbling one after another like players in a *commedia dell'arte* farce. Though, to be fair, there are moments of stately reflection, such as the slow dance of 'Chiara più che 'l chiar sol' to drum and lutes, as well as graceful lute solos such as the *Recercar secondo* and *Fantasia*. **William Yeoman**

Handel

'Abbandonata'

Agrippina condotta a morire, HWV110. Armida abbandonata, HWV105. Figlio d'alte speranze, HWV113. Tra le fiamme, HWV170

Carolyn Sampson *sop*

The King's Consort / Robert King

Vivat © VIVAT117 (75' • DDD • T/t)



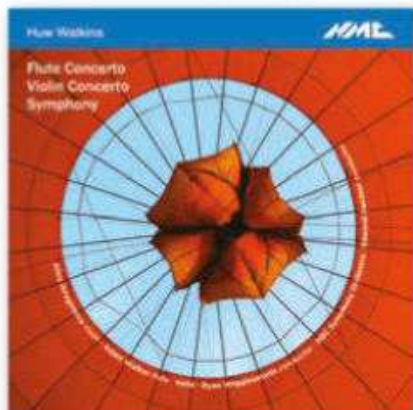
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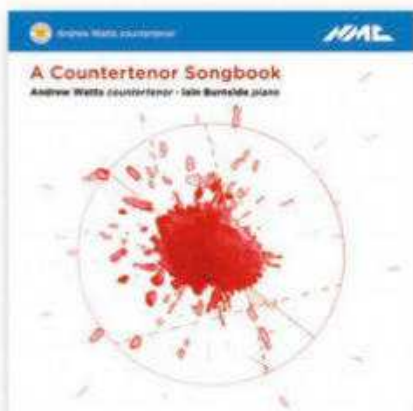
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Huw Watkins *Symphony*
Alina Ibragimova violin, BBC Symphony Orchestra/
Edward Gardner, Adam Walker flute,
Hallé/Ryan Wigglesworth

Marsyas Trio *In the Theatre of Air*
Works by Hilary Tann, Judith Weir, Laura Bowler,
Thea Musgrave, Georgia Rodgers and Amy Beach

Joe Cutler *Elsewhere*
Emulsion Sinfonietta, Workers Unions, Fidelio Trio,
Birmingham Conservatoire Symphony Orchestra/
Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla

Andrew Watts *A Countertenor Songbook*
Works Tansy Davies, Raymond Yiu, Colin Matthews,
Michael Finnissy, Neville Bower, Joe Cutler
and Michael Tippett

Andrew Watts countertenor, Iain Burnside piano

Jonathan Dove *A Brief History of Creation*
BBC Symphony Orchestra/Joséph Pons,
Hallé/Sir Mark Elder, Hallé Children's Choir



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Bozzini Quartet
Philip Thomas piano
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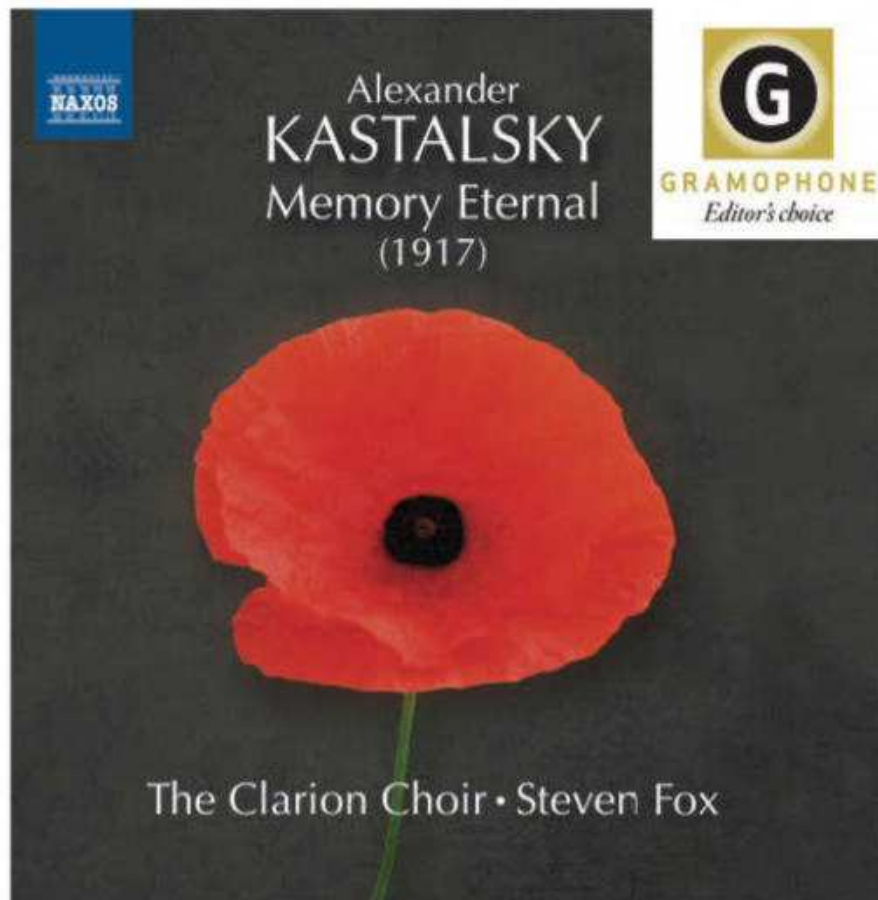
C1003

Van Diemen's Land

Sam Lee vocals
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This world premiere recording of Alexander Kastalsky's *Memory Eternal to the Fallen Heroes* is the second release by The Clarion Choir and Steven Fox. Written in 1917 to honor those who lost their lives in the First World War, it is ever more poignant as the 100th anniversary of the Armistice approaches this November.

Available on Naxos, naxosdirect.com

chamber cantatas for one or two voices that were in effect unstaged operatic scenes. The young Handel, lionised by the Roman elite after his arrival in the city in late 1706, found the cantata an ideal medium for honing his melodic and dramatic fluency. The 80-odd chamber cantatas he composed for his Italian patrons, many of them still little known, were also to prove a fertile quarry for later works (Handel was the last composer to waste a good musical idea).

Carolyn Sampson and Robert King have come up with an appealing programme of four soprano cantatas that range from the tragic, impassioned *Armida abbandonata* and *Agrippina condotta a morire* to the Arcadian *Tra le fiamme*, where poet and composer reflect on the Icarus myth with a light, elegant touch. Sampson's credentials as a superb Baroque stylist hardly need stressing. In *Tra le fiamme* and the rarely heard *Figlio d'alte speranze* – a cantata that ponders the vacillating fortunes of King Abdolonymus – she sings with her familiar grace of phrase and ease of coloratura. Crucially, too, she musters a true trill. Beyond this, Sampson subtly varies her naturally limpid tone in response to the dramatic situation. Words are always clearly and expressively articulated. In *Tra le fiamme* she duets airily with Reiko Ichise's viola da gamba obbligato; and she brings an infectious spirit to the pirouetting final aria of the otherwise introspective *Figlio d'alte speranze*. Only the jog-trotting tempo for the aria 'Pien di nuovo e bel diletto' in *Tra le fiamme* raises doubts. Magdalena Kožená, with Marc Minkowski (Archiv, 2/01), realises so much more vividly Icarus's impatience as he anticipates his first (and last) flight.

Other singers, including Véronique Gens (Virgin, 6/99), Emanuela Galli (Glossa, 10/07) and Roberta Invernizzi (Glossa, 10/06), have brought richer voices and/or more Italianate temperament to the two cantatas drawn from Roman history. And at times – say, in the turbulent 'Venti, fermate' in *Armida* – I wanted a fierier attack, a whiff of danger, from the ever-accomplished King's Consort. But in both works Sampson charts a credible emotional journey, shaping her lines with mingled sensuality and pathos in the beautiful opening aria of *Armida*, abetted by eloquent continuo-playing, and using the Italian consonants to dramatic effect in the recitatives. If Sampson's timbre is naturally more suited to Agrippina's grief and vulnerability than to her ruthless hauteur, she finely manages the violent mood shifts in this magnificent cantata, where one section tumbles intemperately into the next. She musters ample depth of tone

for the empress's explosive eruptions and perfectly catches her mix of pride and heartbreak in the final recitative. Minor reservations aside, here is a disc that can be enthusiastically recommended to Sampson's many admirers and Handel lovers alike. Presentation, too, is first-class, with texts, literate translations and discerning, readable notes from Ruth Smith. **Richard Wigmore**

Janáček

Glagolitic Mass^a. The Fiddler's Child.

Sinfonietta. Taras Bulba

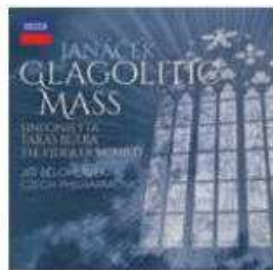
^aHibla Gerzmava sop ^aVeronika Hajnová contr

^aStuart Neill ten ^aJan Martiník bass ^aAleš Bárta org

^aPrague Philharmonic Choir; Czech Philharmonic Orchestra / Jiří Bělohlávek

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There are few more uplifting works in the orchestral repertoire than Janáček's

Sinfonietta, especially when its opening fanfares return in the finale, a burst of big-hearted optimism. And this Janáček collection from Decca is uplifting in its own way, forming a wonderful tribute to the artistry of the late Jiří Bělohlávek. These recordings, made with his beloved Czech Philharmonic in Prague's Rudolfinum, date from October 2013 to February 2017, just three months before he died.

Bělohlávek was the Czech conductor of choice in this repertoire. Few will forget his performances of *Jenůfa* in various cities in 2016, guiding Karita Mattila through her transition from the title-role on to her thrilling debut as the Kostelnička. He could get under the skin of Janáček's music, drawing out its folk roots and speech rhythms, its soul-searching and truthfulness, its sheer humanity.

The main work here is the *Glagolitic Mass*, given an expansive performance of great depth. Like Tomáš Netopil in his Prague RSO account on Supraphon, Bělohlávek uses the 1927 version of the score prepared by Jiří Zahrádka, which differs slightly from Paul Wingfield's original version favoured by Charles Mackerras. Bělohlávek takes a weightier approach than Netopil, rounded brass satisfyingly rich. The Prague Philharmonic Choir (repeating their services for Supraphon) are terrific but the soloists are mixed. The bass lacks the necessary power but Hibla Gerzmava soars in the soprano lines and the robust tenor of Stuart Neill

has its impressive moments. Aleš Bárta dashes off the eccentric organ solo before the closing Intrada with delicious relish.

The Sinfonietta is a joy from first to last, an unbuttoned delight. The low brass is great, rasping and grunting and belching merrily at the garrulous woodwinds in 'The Castle' second movement. Yearning strings come into their own in 'The Queen's Monastery' and Bělohlávek builds brass layers expertly in 'The Street'. This is a recording to challenge my current favourite – José Serebrier's account with the Czech State Philharmonic Brno, in splendid sound and bursting with bonhomie on Reference Recordings.

A second, shorter disc contains a fine reading of the rhapsody *Taras Bulba* and a comparative rarity: *The Fiddler's Child*, a 'Ballad' for violin and orchestra based on a poem by Svatopluk Čech. It's an atmospheric piece – a ghostly little tone poem – and is given a persuasive performance to end this memorial to a great Czech master. **Mark Pullinger**

Glagolitic Mass – selected comparison:

Prague Philb Ch & RSO, Netopil

(10/14) (SUPR) SU4150-2

Sinfonietta, Taras Bulba – selected comparison:

Czech St PO, Brno, Serebrier (4/05) (REFE) RR2103

Janson

Construction. Ky and Fair Madame Ky. Little Mother Globe. Nocturne. Sarabande. Sonnet No 76. This is a great time to live. Three Poems by Ebba Lindqvist. Whisper, Wind. The wind blows – where it wishes

Norwegian Soloists' Choir / Grete Pedersen with Alfred Janson *melodica*

BIS © BIS2341 (66' • DDD • T/t)



While the Norwegian music scene lingered in post-war crisis, attempting to absolve

itself from too many wartime associations with Nazism by looking in every possible new direction from Darmstadt to New York, along came Alfred Janson. With a background in jazz, Janson set the cat among the pigeons with his *Valse triste* (1970): a long way from anything Nationally Romantic, it had a jazz quartet play along to a tape of a televised debate about culture.

The booklet note to this recording talks of Janson's music being 'in the spirit of the age' but all the choral-instrumental works here feel timeless, refreshing and sincere, while many of them are notably bold. Their rigorous simplicity is often tied up in those things. Janson always uses a unison



Grace of phrase and ease of coloratura: Carolyn Sampson sings four of Handel's soprano cantatas with The King's Consort and Robert King

unless there is good reason not to. He borrows beats and grooves from vernacular traditions without the slightest sense of awkwardness or debasement. His larger structures radiate that rare feeling of the composer acting as nothing more than conduit: both *Sarabande* (1995) and *Nocturne* (1967) – each a masterpiece – weave their course with apparent inevitability. The former is the longest piece on the disc (12 minutes) but uses the shortest text (17 words) and there is simply no other way it would have worked; if you listen, you know why.

Every word on every track is crystal clear, whether sung in Norwegian, Swedish or English. There is no better example than *Sonnet No 76*, written for the Norwegian Soloists' Choir. This is a lesson in how to write a complex musical setting of a text while allowing that text not just to remain unfettered but to flourish, dominate and give the impression of the music hardly being there at all. That ability brings Howard Skempton to mind as a point of comparison; Pelle Gudmundsen-Holmgreen is there in the droll humour of settings such as *This is a great time to live* and in the ability to charge unassuming ingredients with overtones of profundity and complexity.

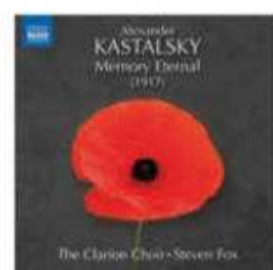
The Norwegian Soloists' Choir have given us *Sonnet No 76* before: it featured on their wonderful 2006 Shakespeare album and even gave it its title: 'Telling what is told' (Simax, 2/07). The performance here demonstrates the extra levels of finesse Grete Pedersen has cultivated in her ensemble in the past decade. *Construction* (after the composer's signature work, *Construction and Hymn for Orchestra*, 1963) tells you why the choir is named as it is. As usual, blend is exquisite, intonation perfect and articulation superlative. The only higher praise is for Janson himself. What a surprise and delight to come across an 82-year-old with such an important, refreshing and honest voice. **Andrew Mellor**

Kastalsky

Blessed are they. Doors of thy mercy. From my youth. Memory eternal to the fallen heroes

The Clarion Choir / Steven Fox

Naxos (M) 8 573889 (56' • DDD • T/t)



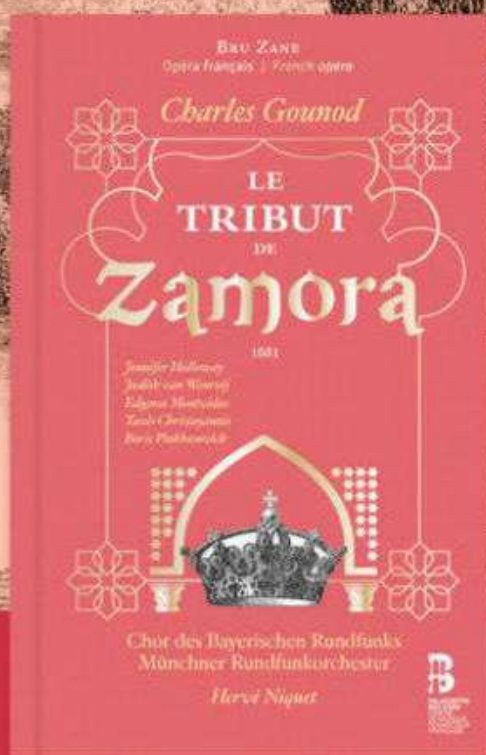
Kastalsky's importance in Russian music of the beginning of the 20th century was very

considerable. Not only was he a fine composer in his own right but he advised and influenced many of his near contemporaries, including Chesnokov, Grechaninov and Rachmaninov. His liturgical style may be heard very clearly in the three pieces that follow the main work on this disc, *Miloserdiya dveri* ('Doors of thy mercy', a work I have always thought underrated and which here receives a performance that truly brings it to life), *Ot yunosti moyeya* ('From my youth') and the resonant *Blazenni, yazhe izbral* ('Blessed are they').

Memory eternal is not itself a strictly liturgical work, though all its texts are liturgical in origin. Following the end of the First World War, Kastalsky felt the need to write a large-scale commemorative work. It exists in a confusing number of versions, the most ambitious of which uses texts in several languages and musical references from a number of religious (not only Christian) traditions, but was not performed until many years later. Another version mixes Orthodox and Roman Catholic funeral texts and includes organ; that recorded here employs texts from the Orthodox memorial service exclusively (though not following the liturgical order exactly) and is a *cappella*.

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It is a deeply impressive work in many ways, beginning with an elaborate setting of the Great Litany, complete here with the priestly petitions, resonantly intoned by Protodeacon Leonid Roschko (the Triple Litany, the work's 10th movement, is also done this way). In the following movements, Kastalsky gives free rein both to his considerable melodic gifts and to his talent for 'choral orchestration', perhaps combining them most impressively in the second movement, 'Alliluya i Glubinyu mudrosti'. One of the highlights of the work is the fifth movement, 'Molitvu proliyu', a brief but heartfelt personal plea for salvation, though the closing 'Vechmaya pamiat', a setting of 'memory eternal' dedicated to the 'warriors killed in battle for their fatherland', is also deeply moving.

The Clarion Choir, under the sure direction of Steven Fox, turn in a thrilling performance, recorded with clarity and not too much resonance in St Jean Baptiste Church in New York. This recording (together with its publication by Musica Russica) represents the rehabilitation of a major work, which nobody interested in Russian music of the 20th century should miss. **Ivan Moody**

Machaut

'The Gentle Physician'

Dame, comment qu'amez. De bonté, de valour.
De Fortune. Helas! et comment aroie. J'aim miex
languir. Je vivoie liement. Maugré mon cuer/
De ma dolour/Quia amore langueo. Quant
ma dame. S'onques dolereusement 'Le lay
de confort'

The Orlando Consort

Hyperion © CDA68206 (60' • DDD • T/t)



The centrepiece of this disc is *Le lay de confort*, a setting of the longest of the poetic forms available to Machaut. Each of its 12 sections is a three-voice canon at the unison, a compositional challenge by anyone's standards. The use of canon may well have been suggested by the text, a meditation on the perils of trusting to Fortune, whose wheel was a perennial metaphor for the mutability of the human condition; but the musical intricacies thus generated – including changes of time signature, unexpected cross-rhythms and syncopations – make this perhaps more immediately accessible to today's listener than some of Machaut's other works in the form. The Orlandos show remarkable staying power here, given the decision throughout to project the music and

text 'loud and clear', as Machaut might have put it.

As this recital progresses one is struck yet again with the sheer consistency of Machaut's art. Despite recognisable phrases recurring from work to work, each piece has something to say. The Orlandos hit their stride in this series some time ago, and collectively they gel wonderfully, though the solo virelais fare less well this time around. An occasional feature has been to offer slightly off-centre insights into Machaut's style. Here, the three-voice rondeau *De Fortune*, which opens the recital, is revisited at the end with a fourth voice that was probably added later by another composer. Only the one stanza of the later version is sung, which seems a shame given that the impact of the fourth voice would be better appreciated with the repetitions the form entails. It transforms the original's lucid design into an almost baroque jungle of counterpoint: exhilarating. **Fabrice Fitch**

Monteverdi

Vespro della Beata Vergine

Dorothee Mields, Barbora Kabátková *sops*

Benedict Hymas, William Knight, Reinoud Van

Mechelen, Samuel Boden *tens* **Peter Kooij, Wolf**

Matthias Friedrich *basses* **Collegium Vocale Gent /**

Philippe Herreweghe

PHI © ② LPH029 (88' • DDD • T/t)



Philippe Herreweghe's 1986 recording of Monteverdi's *Vespers* had an oratorio-style nobility, soft choral wooliness, stately measured speeds and cautiously deliberate rhythms in quick music. He fielded violas on the inner string parts, cello and contrabass string instruments playing much of the time, prominent bassoon on selected bass lines (eg the ostinato in 'Laetatus sum'), copious recorder and brass doubling and prominent harpsichord continuo – although he had caught early on to Andrew Parrott's argument that *chiavette* clefs in 'Lauda Jerusalem' and the *Magnificat* require downward transposition.

Over 30 years later, Herreweghe's radical rethinking yields shaded flexibility and kaleidoscopic dynamism. For a demonstration of his evolved approach, try the precision, transparent contrapuntal detail and focused Italianate sonorities of 'Nisi Dominus', the streamlined and conversational 'Ave maris stella' and the lively fantasy of the instrumentalists in the dancelike *Sonata sopra Sancta Maria* – all of them infinitely fresher and less self-

consciously mannered than used to be the case.

The eight soloists (with high tenor instead of countertenor on the alto part) now sing throughout all choral pieces, reinforced only occasionally by 14 ripieno singers in *tutti* passages (for example, at the climactic doxologies). Collegium Vocale Gent field about the same number of instrumentalists as in 1986 but their constitution and application are considerably different – there are neither bowed string bass instruments nor bassoon, violas da gamba are used instead of violas and cellos, the recorders, cornetts (led expertly by Bruce Dickey) and trombones tend to play where the rubrics in Monteverdi's 1610 publication demand them – thereby making a more selective and thrilling impact. The applications of continuo instrumentation (with an extra theorbo) and manner of their playing are subtler nowadays. The performing pitch is higher, in line with scholarly thinking. The only significant preserved element is that Herreweghe still inserts brief plainsong antiphons before every large-scale concertato psalm and the *Magnificat*. Not a liturgical reconstruction, the chants construct architectural sequences of triptychs with a psalm, solo 'concerto' or hymn as their centrepieces.

There is judicious tightrope-walking between the disciplined unleashing of splendid sonorities (the trombones at the closing of the *Magnificat* pack a surprisingly visceral punch) and exquisite intimacy in smaller-scale solo music performed with impeccable skill. Reinoud Van Mechelen's gently stylish 'Nigra sum', Dorothee Mields and Barbora Kabátková's rapturous 'Pulchra es' and Samuel Boden's sweetly eloquent 'Audi coelum' (with sensitive echoes from Benedict Hymas) are exceptionally beautiful. One never senses a dictating ego controlling proceedings; there is a spirit of collective chamber music-making from all participants that is classy, articulate and unerringly beguiling. Recordings of the 1610 *Vespers* are two-a-penny but very few have delighted and impressed me as much as this. **David Vickers**

Selected comparison:

Herreweghe (2/88) (HARM)

➔ HMG50 1247/8 or HMX290 1247/8

Stravinsky

Perséphone

Andrew Staples *ten* **Pauline Cheviller** *spkr*

Finnish National Opera Chorus, Children's

Chorus and Orchestra / Esa-Pekka Salonen

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Recorded live at the Finnish National Opera, Helsinki, August 11, 2017

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'A humanist *Rite of Spring*' was Elliott Carter's description of Stravinsky's

'melodrama with dance', composed in 1933-34 to a text by André Gide. One of the great works of his neoclassical period, it has also proved to be among the most elusive. Written for tenor, female speaker, two choirs and orchestra, it amalgamates spoken drama, ballet and oratorio in ways that make it both unclassifiable and difficult to perform successfully. Its outings have always been rare.

Perséphone's genesis was messy. It was commissioned by the dancer Ida Rubinstein but the collaboration soured when Gide took offence at Stravinsky's decision to ignore his versification and set the libretto syllabically: Gide subsequently absented himself from the premiere, in which Rubinstein both danced and spoke the title-role. In the early 1930s Gide had publicly embraced communism, which he saw idiosyncratically as the active fulfilment of Christ's teaching in the Gospels, and his text reinvents Homeric myth along religious-political lines by making Perséphone descend voluntarily to the Underworld out of compassion for its suffering inhabitants rather than being abducted by Pluto. One can't imagine that Stravinsky was entirely in sympathy with its stance.

Carter's description of *Perséphone* as 'humanist' is perhaps inaccurate, though it is indeed very much a second *Rite of Spring*, albeit one which replaces violence with the contemplation of ideas of self-sacrifice and renewal: the priest Eumolpus, both celebrant and narrator, presides over a spoken and danced re-enactment of Perséphone's effective death and resurrection, while a congregation of believers reflects upon what they witness. The work could be best described as a 'ballet-oratorio', comparable to the 'opera-oratorio' of *Oedipus rex*, with which it has much in common: the use of framing devices to keep us at arm's length from the drama while exposing us to the emotions it conveys; choral writing that glances both at Orthodox church music and Baroque oratorio; the sparse yet effective orchestral writing. The dances, meanwhile, peer back through *Le baiser de la fée*, which Rubinstein also commissioned, to the ballets of Tchaikovsky and Glazunov.

Esa-Pekka Salonen is the most recent conductor to champion the work, first with the Philharmonia in London in

2016, then last year, with the same soloists, at the Finnish National Opera, where this superb recording was made. His approach is pitched somewhere between the steely solemnity of Stravinsky's own New York Philharmonic version (Sony, 11/57) and the more effusive lyricism of Kent Nagano with the LPO (Virgin/Erato, 6/92). Orchestral textures are clean yet sensuous, rhythms exactly precise. The instrumental solos, sometimes twining round the voices like obligatos, sometimes carrying the narrative forwards, are all beautifully done. In lesser hands, the score can seem episodic. Salonen, however, forges it into a unified drama, in which not a note or word seems wasted.

The choral singing, meanwhile, is warm and focused, the counterpoint admirably clear. Andrew Staples makes a fine Eumolpus, lyrical yet authoritative – as good as Nagano's Anthony Rolfe Johnson and vastly preferable to Stravinsky's abrasive-sounding Richard Robinson. Pauline Chevallier, meanwhile, plays the title-role with great sincerity, giving free rein to the incantatory quality of Gide's verse where some actresses are apt to hold back. She's placed very close in a recording that is otherwise immaculately balanced, but that is a minor cavil: this is an exceptional achievement, and the best recording of *Perséphone* that I know.

Tim Ashley

'Into the Fire'

Debussy Chansons de Bilitis (arr Heggie)

FX Gruber Silent night (arr Brentano Qt)

Heggie Camille Claudel: Into the Fire

Lekeu Molto adagio **R Strauss** Die Nacht, Op 10 No 3^a. Schlichte Weisen, Op 21^a - No 1, All mein' Gedanken; No 2, Du meines Herzens Krönelein; No 3, Ach Lieb, ich muss nun scheiden. Morgen!, Op 27 No 4. Traum durch die Dämmerung, Op 29 No 1^a (arr ^aMisha Amory and Mark Steinberg)

Joyce DiDonato *mez* **Brentano Quartet**

Erato © 9029 56421-9 (78' • DDD • T/t)

Recorded live at Wigmore Hall, London,

December 21, 2017



As if anyone needed reminding that Joyce DiDonato is nothing if not an intuitive stage animal, all of her recital projects are now carefully conceived as pieces of theatre in themselves, song choices shrewdly weighed and tested for their collective and accumulative effect. For this live Wigmore recital (which I imagine was repeated

internationally) all paths lead to Jake Heggie's dramatic song-cycle *Into the Fire* (written for her and the Alexander Quartet back in 2012) with preceding choices establishing tangential themes, common links and an assortment of moods.

Most strikingly, DiDonato and her collaborators here – the Brentano Quartet – carry the colour of voice and string quartet through the recital via familiar Strauss arranged by Mark Steinberg and Misha Amory (violinist and viola player of the Brentano four) and Debussy's *Chansons de Bilitis*, arranged by Heggie himself. And the highest compliment I can pay all three of the arrangers is that it sounds as if those songs were conceived and swathed this way all along.

Strauss's 'Die Nacht' is more of a shroud, it has to be said, DiDonato receding into its mystery and apprehension through an ever-whitening sound. Wigmore Hall encourages intimacy in her Strauss, her departure into 'the land of love' at the close of 'Traum durch die Dämmerung' ('Dream in the Twilight') magically invoking the 'soft blue light' which is all but visible in the closing chords.

But whose decision was it to retain applause at this point, where for the purposes of home listening a natural and breathtaking segue could have been achieved from the Strauss into the Belgian composer Guillaume Lekeu's *Molto adagio sempre cantante doloroso* – a passionate elaboration on the words from Matthew's Gospel, 'My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death' written when he was a mere 17 and only a handful of years away from death himself. There is profound kinship here with Camille Claudel, the hapless heroine of Heggie and Gene Scheer's piece.

And Heggie plainly saw the curvaceous Frenchness of the Debussy songs as the perfect portal into his own cycle, possessed as they are of a shifting light that is entirely sculptural. Again, though, ruinous applause violates the atmosphere at the close.

In celebrating the tragic but significant life of the sculptor Rodin's mistress and kindred spirit Camille Claudel, Heggie has found a music which is in perfect harmony with the way in which Claudel's sculptures move, or rather dance. His great gift (as I have reiterated several times in these pages) is for finding the natural music of words and here he does so in an especially seductive and danceable way.

The erotic reverie of the opening song, 'Rodin', encapsulates Claudel's conflicted feelings, at once sensuous and anxious. Love and regret. The theatrical climax

in which she effectively shouts his name is immediately silenced by the sound of her speaking it once more – hushed and ambivalent. DiDonato catches that ambivalence perfectly. A feverish ‘La valse’ harkens back to Debussy, who knew Claudel (though quite how well is a matter for speculation) and kept a copy of her famous sculpture of that name in his studio. Most heartbreaking of all is the lullaby, ‘Le petite châtelaine’, for Claudel’s aborted child.

She ended her life in an asylum and the inspired little scena which concludes *Into the Fire* recalls a visit Claudel received there from Jessie Lipscomb, an English artist with whom she had once shared a studio. ‘Every dream I ever had was of music’, Claudel tells her friend and Heggie’s music, with its hypnotic repetitions, underscores that sentiment just as it has done from the very start. This is a wonderful calling card for DiDonato. Small wonder she has become something of a muse for Heggie.

The applause at last feels appropriate and DiDonato’s two encores – Strauss’s ‘Morgen’ in another arrangement by Steinberg (where DiDonato doesn’t sound entirely comfortable to my ears) and a seasonal greeting (it was December 21) in Franz Gruber’s ‘Silent night’ (arranged by the Brentanos) – are still mindful of the evening’s dramatic turns. **Edward Seckerson**

‘Melancholia’

‘Madrigals and Motets around 1600’

Byrd Come to me grief forever. Lullaby, my sweet little baby. Tristitia et anxietas **Gesualdo** Mercè grido piangendo. O vos omnes (two versions). Tristis est anima mea **Gibbons** What is our life? **Luzzaschi** Quivi sospiri **Marenzio** Crudele acerba inesorabil’ morte. Solo e pensoso **Nenna** La mia doglia s’avanza **Tudino** Altro che lagrimar **Weelkes** O Care, thou wilt despatch me **Wilbye** Draw on, sweet night. O wretched man

Les Cris de Paris / Geoffroy Jourdain

Harmonia Mundi © HMM90 2298 (67’ • DDD • T/t)



Les Cris de Paris are pretty hard to capture in a brief paragraph. Readers will recognise

them as the chorus in Bizet’s *Les pêcheurs de perles*, admired by Mark Pullinger in the August issue, yet they have a much wider repertoire and deliciously rampant musical appetite. This, their first disc with Harmonia Mundi, is to be welcomed and I hope to hear much more from these brilliant musicians in future.

For this programme, ‘Melancholia’, they delve into an adventurous and sumptuous moment of musical history: the 16th century’s own *fin de siècle*, which Geoffroy Jourdain dubs a musical avant-garde. Many listeners will readily associate this period with the virtuoso Italian madrigalists – Wert, Gesualdo et al – but Jourdain convincingly argues for closer connections between such audacious Italian lamenting and the exquisite English melancholia of Byrd, Dowland and their ilk. For me this works incredibly well, painting intriguing connections between the extrovert chromaticism of Gesualdo and the introvert density of Byrd’s consort textures as well as freely crossing the sacred/secular divide.

The singers make a beautifully balanced sound with impressive fluency across each style. I especially love the countertenors and their cheeky but knowing presence in the intense chromatic moments of Gesualdo’s *O vos omnes*; warmer, but less sure-footed than The Tallis Scholars (Gimell, 12/87). Here, and throughout this album, there is a pleasing tension between a consort blend and the vital quirkiness of individual voices.

Perhaps the most impressive tracks are the recurring instrumental performances of Byrd’s *Lullaby, my sweet little baby* ‘imbued with sad premonition’ and his elegy on the death of Philip Sidney, *Come to me grief forever*. The juxtaposition of forward-looking and retrospective portraits of melancholia are touchingly referenced in the booklet notes and in both pieces I have been long preoccupied with the superb performances by Fretwork with Michael Chance (Virgin/Erato, 3/91, 11/98). I never thought their intimate, sinewy sound could be matched; but here Jourdain’s pairing of serpent, cornet and viols brings a gloriously rich hue to Byrd’s music. To bastardise Victor Hugo, never was there such pleasure in being sad. **Edward Breen**

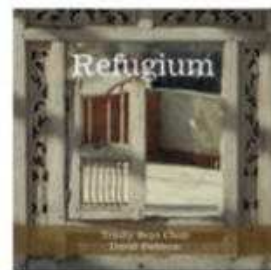
‘Refugium’

Brito-Babapulle Organ Improvisation **Dove**

Seek him that maketh the seven stars **Harrold** From Dreams **Lack** Refugium **H Moody** Weigh me the fire **Tavener** Hymn to the Mother of God **Weir** Two Human Hymns **Wilberforce** The Song of the Shadows

Trinity Boys Choir / David Swinson with **Lewis Brito-Babapulle** *org* **Michael Prager** *positive org* **Rainer Furthner, Thomas Hastreiter, Sabine Pyrker** *perc*

Stone Records © 5060192 780819 (64’ • DDD • T/t)
Recorded live at the Herz-Jesu-Kirche, Munich, April 1, 2012



The booklet is confusing. It reveals nothing about Trinity Boys

Choir or their conductor, prints a curious essay describing Durham Cathedral by the Bishop of Bath and Wells, who then goes on to identify the origins of numerous sacred texts that do not feature in the musical settings, and then details the music in a different order to that in which it appears in the recording.

The focus of the recording is the Herz-Jesu-Kirche in Munich and its stunning Woehl organ. We hear a tiny solo from that organ in a brief improvisation by Lewis Brito-Babapulle but its true glories are demonstrated in lavish organ parts to several of these contemporary British choral works, notably Howard Moody’s *Weigh me the fire* and Judith Weir’s ‘Love bade me welcome’.

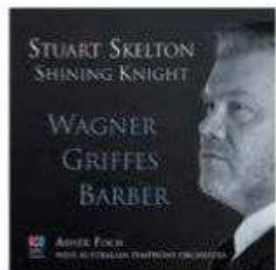
The musical centrepiece and, according to the booklet notes, the very *raison d’être* of this recording is Graham Lack’s seven-section *Refugium*. Described as being scored for three separate ‘islands’ of percussion with choir and organ, this is a masterly piece of writing which achieves extraordinary effect, greatly helped by this truly outstanding performance. David Swinson’s measured approach gives ample space for the unique instrumental forces while judiciously shepherding his choir’s reserves – the recording was made live and there are moments where a certain collective exhaustion makes its presence felt. This is a taxing work for all concerned but minor imperfections do not in any way detract from its intense beauty. Among the most enchanting moments are the lovely dialogue between organ and glockenspiel in ‘Fede e realtà’ and the profoundly lovely choral chords over glittering organ and bells in ‘Respice quod salvant’.

Effective as *Refugium* is, the outstanding performance on the disc has to be a riveting account of Jonathan Dove’s *Seek him that maketh the seven stars*, while the most musically arresting is Tom Harrold’s *From Dreams* for three-part boys’ choir and marimba – a combination which works extraordinarily well in this highly atmospheric and spiritually charged recording.

Marc Rochester

'Shining Knight'

Barber Sure on this shining night **Griffes** Three Poems of Fiona MacLeod **Wagner** Lohengrin - In fernem Land, unnahbar euren Schritten. Parsifal - Amfortas! Die Wunde! Die Wunde! Nur eine Waffe taugt. Rienzi - Allmächt'ger Vater, blick herab. Die Walküre - Winterstürme wichen dem Wonnemond. Wesendonck Lieder
Stuart Skelton *ten* **West Australian Symphony Orchestra / Asher Fisch**
 ABC Classics © ABC481 7219 (65' • DDD • T/t)



'All my life's buried here ...' Stuart Skelton writes, quoting Oscar Wilde with self-

deprecating irony, at the end of the booklet note for his first solo album. 'Shining Knight', one suspects, is in some ways deeply personal – a summing up, perhaps, of what he describes as the 'confoundingly successful career' that has established him as one of today's finest Wagner singers. Yet his recital also contains much that is new. Of his signature roles we possess only Siegmund on disc, so this offers us a first opportunity to hear him as Lohengrin, Parsifal and Rienzi away from the theatre. In place of Tristan, however, considered by many his finest achievement, he gives us the *Wesendonck Lieder*, before closing with Griffes and Barber, whom he regards as embodying the post-Wagnerian tradition in American music.

He's in fine voice throughout, his tone shining and bronzed, his dynamic control often immaculate. Rienzi's prayer is gloriously *bel canto*, as it should be. In the *Lohengrin* and *Parsifal* extracts, we're aware of the wider contexts of narrative and character, so a sudden shaft of regret at imminent parting intrudes on the mystic introversion of 'In fernem Land', and the juxtaposition of his anguished 'Amfortas! Die Wunde!' with the spiritual certainty of 'Nur eine Waffe taugt' reminds us of the immense psychological distance that Parsifal travels during the course of the work. Asher Fisch and his West Australian Symphony Orchestra are finely alert throughout to the ebb and flow of Wagner's music, so the concert endings feel unusually brutal, in *Parsifal* above all.

The *Wesendonck Lieder* in Mottl's orchestration, meanwhile, have always been a difficult prospect for tenors. They lie comparatively low, sometimes taking Skelton into territory where the sheen drains from his tone, though there are compensatory insights: fastidious attention to the gloomy mood of the text; his use of a creepy *mezza voce* in 'Im Treibhaus'; and

an almost shocking surge of passion at 'Glorie der ganzen Welt' in 'Schmerzen', which colours the rest of the cycle even as its beauty ebbs away.

The songs by Griffes and Barber are tremendous. Skelton clearly loves this music, and his voice blazes with conviction in *Three Poems of Fiona MacLeod*, where the emotions are intense and confrontative: Fisch does wonders with Griffes's darkly sensual textures, too. Barber's 'Sure on this shining night', relaxing the tension into wonder at the beauty of the universe, forms a perfect envoi. It's a fine recital that leaves you wanting more – of Skelton singing Griffes, perhaps, above all. **Tim Ashley**

'A Walk With Ivor Gurney'

Bingham A Walk With Ivor Gurney **Gurney**
 By a Bierside (orch Howells). In Flanders (orch Howells). Since I believe in God the Father Almighty. Sleep (orch Finzi) **Howells** Like as the hart **Vaughan Williams** Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis. Lord, thou hast been our refuge. An Oxford Elegy. Valiant for Truth
Dame Sarah Connolly *mez* **Simon Callow** *narr*
Tenebrae; Aurora Orchestra / Nigel Short
 Signum © (two discs for the price of one) SIGCD557 (87' • DDD • T)



Here's a nourishing, thoughtfully compiled release from Signum, one of the keys to

which can be found in some lines from one of Ivor Gurney's late poems entitled 'Gloucester Song': 'I walk the land my fathers knew, wide to distant blue / And summon all the tales unseen, the good earth lets them through.' Commissioned by Tenebrae in 2013 and exquisitely laid out for mezzo-soprano and mixed choir, Judith Bingham's *A Walk with Ivor Gurney* dovetails settings of passages from four Gurney poems with inscriptions on Roman tomb memorials found in Gloucestershire. The music effortlessly evokes (in the composer's own words) 'the sense Gurney had of time and people of the past residing in the landscape'. On this premiere recording, Sarah Connolly teams up with Tenebrae under Nigel Short's watchful lead to give a performance of breathtaking composure, spine-tingling atmosphere and palpable conviction.

Connolly also excels in three Gurney songs: 'In Flanders' and 'By a Bierside' (an especially powerful rendering) are heard in Herbert Howells's tasteful orchestrations, while Gerald Finzi's arrangement of 'Sleep' (one of the *Five Elizabethan Songs* from 1913-14) was fashioned for a

performance in 1949 by his Newbury String Players with the soprano Elsie Suddaby as soloist. (Some three decades earlier, the teenage Finzi had heard Suddaby sing it with his teacher Edward Bairstow, a revelatory experience which made him more determined than ever to become a composer.) Both Gurney's 1925 motet for double choir *Since I believe in God the Father Almighty* and Howells's sublime 1941 anthem *Like as the hart* likewise enjoy memorably poised, fervent advocacy.

More than half of the programme's 87-minute duration is devoted to Vaughan Williams, launching with the *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* – that toweringly original canvas which left such an indelible impression on Gurney and Howells when they first heard it in Gloucester Cathedral at the 1910 Three Choirs Festival. Short's scrupulously prepared, shrewdly paced account with the Aurora Orchestra generates a most agreeable unanimity of purpose, dedication and passionate glow. He also masterminds admirable performances of *Valiant for Truth* (a 1941 *a cappella* setting of John Bunyan's words for that eponymous character in *The Pilgrim's Progress*) and the 1921 treatment of Psalm 90, *Lord, thou hast been our refuge* (which rousingly incorporates the hymn-tune 'O God our help in ages past'). As for *An Oxford Elegy* (a 1949 adaptation of texts from Matthew Arnold's 'The Scholar Gypsy' and 'Thyrsis' for narrator, chorus and orchestra), it's hard not to be touched by the deep sincerity and sheer quality of inspiration that course through what annotator Philip Lancaster aptly describes as 'a rich, Samuel Palmer-like description of an England-Eden; a vivid depiction of a midsummer idyll that is more a state of mind than a reality'. Expertly supported by Short's combined choral and orchestral forces, Simon Callow delivers Arnold's verse most sensitively, but his contribution is not as stylishly integrated into the whole as on, say, the incomparable John Westbrook's extraordinarily moving 1969 collaboration with David Willcocks at the helm (where the closing pages convey a lump-in-the-throat emotion not readily matched here – EMI/Warner, 2/70).

Overall verdict? If the imaginative concept appeals, this is well worth seeking out. **Andrew Achenbach**

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WHAT NEXT?

Do you have a favourite piece of music and want to explore further? Our monthly feature suggests some musical journeys that venture beyond the most familiar works. This month **Richard Whitehouse** starts with a mid-20th-century masterpiece ...

Bartók's *Concerto for Orchestra (1943)*

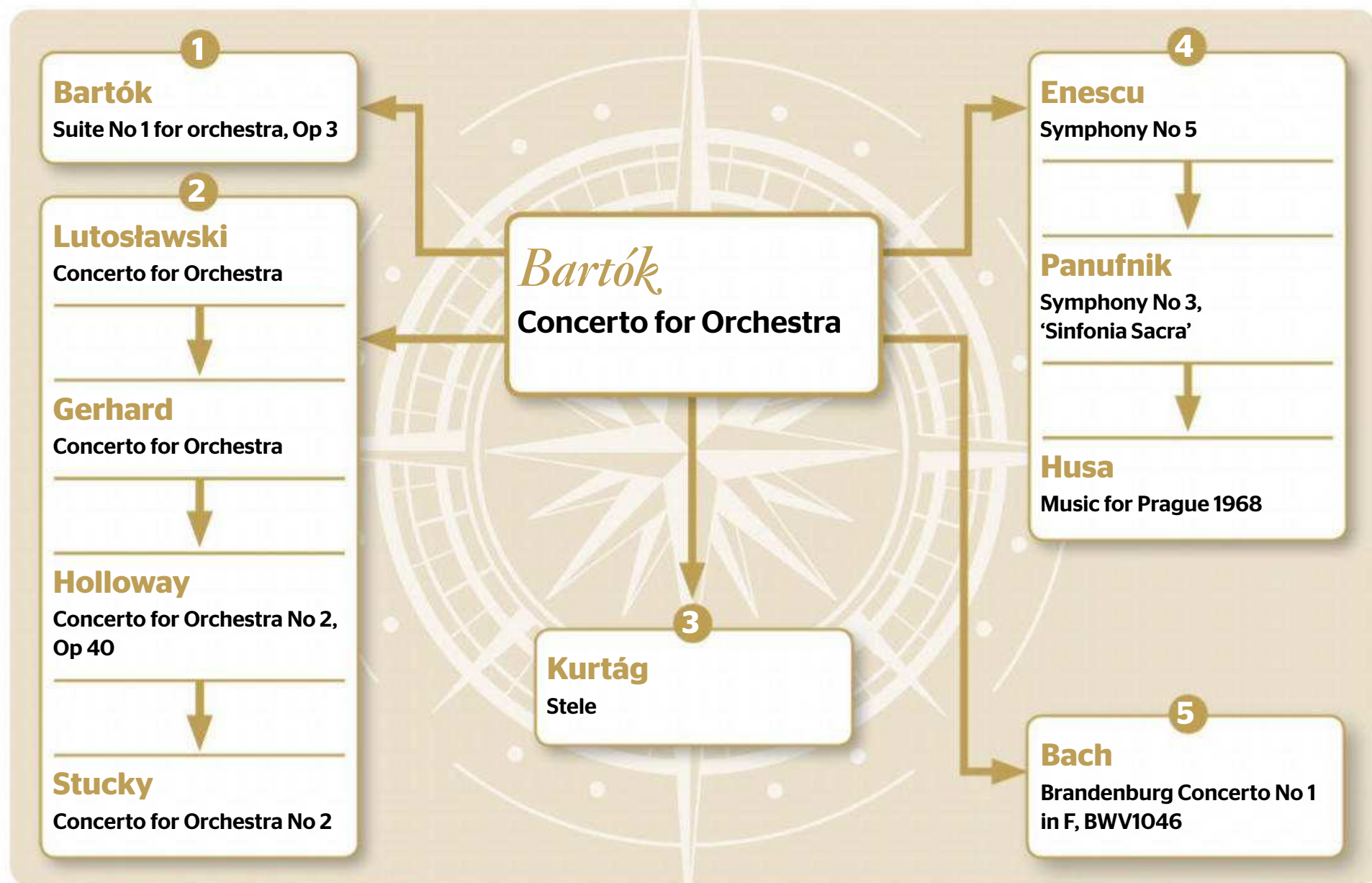
Written between August and October 1943, then premiered in December the following year by the Boston Symphony Orchestra with Serge Koussevitzky, the Concerto for Orchestra marked Bartók's return to composition after four years during which illness and the traumas of self-imposed exile made creative work impossible. Its five movements unfold from a dramatic Introduzione, through the playful 'Presentando le coppie' (or 'Giuoco delle coppie'), the heartfelt Elegia and the quixotic 'Intermezzo interrotto', to an affirmative finale. Harnessing symphonic rigour with sheer virtuosity, it remains among Bartók's most representative pieces and a touchstone for the maintenance of integrity in the face of tragedy, while securing genuine and lasting acclaim. For a recording that more than

does it justice, look no further than Iván Fischer's version with his Budapest forces. A work this wide-ranging suggests numerous subsidiary routes. Here are just five of them.

● Budapest Festival Orchestra / Iván Fischer (Philips, 1/99)

1 *Personal precedents*

Bartók Suite No 1 for orchestra, Op 3 (1905) Bartók latterly had a low opinion of his first orchestral suite, though this garrulous fusion of Straussian opulence with a Hungarian popular idiom redolent of Liszt does anticipate his late masterpiece in several respects. Not least in its neatly symmetrical, five-movement structure, albeit here with a bombastic scherzo at its centre and little overall sense



of evolution beyond the hearty opening theme returning at its close. It's entertaining whatever its stylistic limitations.

● Hungarian National Philharmonic Orchestra / Zoltán Kocsis (Hungaroton)

2 Generic equivalents

Lutosławski Concerto for Orchestra (1954) Stalinist conformity may have weighed heavily upon Lutosławski's music of the early 1950s, but his Concerto for Orchestra marries folkloristic immediacy with technical panache in what was a keen riposte to those wielding cultural power. Bartók is evident in its five sections: a seismic passacaglia framed by a speculative capriccio and energetic toccata, then in turn by an imposing intrada and eloquent corale building to a triumphal apotheosis.

● BBC Symphony Orchestra / Edward Gardner (Chandos, 12/10)

Gerhard Concerto for Orchestra (1965) Fleeing Spain after the civil war, Roberto Gerhard settled in Cambridge, where he evolved an idiom of increasing audacity. Not least in his Concerto for Orchestra, a single-movement explosion of sonic brilliance that reinforced his radical credentials. Nor is there any lack of emotional content; memories of Gerhard's homeland being evoked in passages of magical suspense that conjure a fallen Don Quixote. This is a work exemplifying just what music can convey.

● BBC Symphony Orchestra / Matthias Bamert (Chandos, 11/99)

Holloway Concerto for Orchestra No 2, Op 40 (1979) Robin Holloway's five concertos for orchestra run across his output as might symphonies for an earlier generation. The Second has enjoyed some notable advocacy, not least from the late Oliver Knussen, who appreciated just how this work's expressive excesses are tempered by its formal rigour. The compact and tensile outer movements frame one where Holloway's love of late Romantic effulgence is at its most uninhibited, while being kept tantalizingly in focus.

● BBC Symphony Orchestra / Oliver Knussen (NMC, 5/94)

Stucky Concerto for Orchestra No 2 (2003) With his roots in Lutosławski and hence Bartók, Steven Stucky was a composer of no mean imaginative resource and technical finesse. His Second Concerto for Orchestra exudes such qualities in full measure, its three movements taking in allusions to earlier 'classics' without these seeming wanton or hackneyed. The result is as intriguing as it is pleasurable, and one instance where receipt of the frequently controversial Pulitzer Prize was undeniably deserved.

● Singapore Symphony Orchestra / Lan Shui (BIS, 10/10)

3 Hungarian connections

Kurtág Stele (1994) Most cryptic of present-day masters György Kurtág might not have been expected to write a concerto for orchestra. His 13-minute *Stele* ('Monument'), commissioned by the Berlin Philharmonic, is his longest purely orchestral work, its three movements evoking ominousness, catastrophe and resignation in music whose utilisation of vast forces is itself virtuosity *malgré lui*. Whether this constitutes a teetering on the brink or dancing on a volcano is for each listener to decide.

● Berlin Philharmonic / Claudio Abbado (DG)

4 European exiles

Enescu Symphony No 5 (1941; 1945/46) Drafted on the brink of war, then partially elaborated just before (or maybe after) Enescu headed into exile, his Fifth Symphony has a profundity the greater



From Bartók to Stucky, many composers have relished writing concertos for orchestra

for its understatement. Its first three movements are respectively contemplative, intimate then anguished; the finale's setting of a Mihai Eminescu poem ('When soon I'm laid to rest') duly affording a serene benediction. This is essentially a requiem, and a significant addition to the ranks of unfinished last symphonies. Pascal Bentoiu's 1995 completion is the version heard in the recording cited below.

● Marius Vlad *ten* NDR Choir; German Radio Philharmonic, Saarbrücken & Kaiserslautern / Peter Ruzicka (CPO, 10/14)

Panufnik Symphony No 3, 'Sinfonia Sacra' (1963) As Bartók had chosen exile from fascist Hungary, so Panufnik chose exile from Communist Poland. Establishing him in the West, *Sinfonia Sacra* marked Poland's millennium via three diverse 'Visions' for (respectively) trumpets, strings, and brass with percussion; an expansive 'Hymn' then builds on the plainchant *Bogurodzica* ('Mother of God') to a majestic peroration. Banned for 15 years in Poland, the work was accorded an ovation when Panufnik returned just before his death.

● Konzerthaus Orchestra, Berlin / Łukasz Borowicz (CPO, 3/12)

Husa Music for Prague 1968 (1969) Karel Husa was a Czech emigrant living in the US when Soviet-backed troops invaded his home country during spring 1968. Originally written for wind band in 1968 then arranged for full orchestra the following year, *Music for Prague 1968* is a charged symphonic suite, its use of the Hussite chorale 'Ye Warriors of God' a provocative statement of intent as it had once been for Smetana and Dvořák. Husa pays handsome tribute to the city, which, as he latterly commented, 'has seen [freedom] only for moments during its thousand years of existence'.

● Los Angeles Philharmonic / Esa-Pekka Salonen (DG)

5 Where it's coming from

Bach Brandenburg Concerto No 1 in F, BWV1046 (c1721) Bach's *Brandenburg Concertos* anticipate those genres variously defined as orchestral music way into the future. With its four contrasted movements and diverse instrumentation, the first concerto evinces traits both of symphony and concerto for orchestra. This latter comes to the fore in a finale whose cumulative alternation between types of motion set a precedent which Bartók fulfilled with comparable impetus in his Concerto for Orchestra more than 200 years later.

● European Brandenburg Ensemble / Trevor Pinnock (Avie, 3/08)

Opera



Andrew Farach-Colton explores Edward Loder's *Raymond and Agnes*:

'Richard Bonyngue is an old hand in this area of the repertoire, of course, and the performance is mostly very good' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 92**



Richard Osborne hears a revival of an early Rossini rarity:

'Aureliano in Palmira has always sat somewhat in Tancredi's shade, yet it has its own charm and allure' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 95**

Donizetti



La favorite

Veronica Simeoni *mez*..... Léonor de Guzman
Celso Albelo *ten*..... Fernand
Mattia Olivieri *bar*..... Alphonse XI
Ugo Guagliardo *bass*..... Balthazar
Francesca Longari *sop*..... Inès
Manuel Amati *ten*..... Don Gaspar
Leonardo Sgroi *ten*..... A Lord

Chorus and Orchestra of the Maggio

Musicale, Florence / Fabio Luisi

Stage director **Ariel García Valdés**

Video director **Matteo Ricchetti**

Dynamic (F) ② CDS7822; (F) ② 37822;

(F) 57822 (156' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i •

DTS-HD MA5.1, DD5.1 & PCM stereo • 0 • s)

Recorded live, February 2018

Includes synopsis; CD includes libretto and translation



Donizetti abandoned work on *Le duc d'Albe* when the director of the Paris Opéra, Léon Pillet, objected that there would be no leading role for his mistress, Rosine Stoltz. Instead, the composer turned to Eugène Scribe and they quickly revised the libretto of the recently abandoned *L'ange de Nisida*, the subject of which was ... the king's mistress! One hopes Pillet enjoyed a sense of irony.

Set in 14th-century Castile, *La favorite* follows the plight of Fernand, who abandons taking holy orders to pursue the beautiful but mysterious Léonor, who turns out to be the mistress of King Alphonse XI. The opera was premiered in December 1840 – with La Stoltz as Léonor – and has enjoyed sporadic success, not least in its Italian version (*La favorita*). Stagings now, even in Italy, favour the French original, as in the case of this one from the Maggio Musicale Fiorentino, a co-production with Barcelona's Liceu and Madrid's Teatro Real.

One wonders what sort of budget the Argentinian actor and director Ariel García Valdés had to work with, for his period production is minimalist in the extreme. Jean-Pierre Vergier's set is dominated

by a giant rock which doubles as the monastery of Santiago de Compostela and the island of Leon, where Fernand has an assignation with Léonor. Costumes are unfeasibly shiny and look cheap. Valdés's direction is pretty static, betraying a lack of experience staging opera, but there are some reliable vocal performances to enjoy. Mezzo Veronica Simeoni copes well with her key aria and Celso Albelo has a lovely, pliant tone as Fernand. Mattia Olivieri is a youthful Alphonse, without quite managing the long lines in 'Pour tant d'amour'. The Maggio Musicale's new music director, Fabio Luisi, gives a lucid account of Donizetti's lyrical score.

It's unfortunate that Dynamic's release faces stiff recent competition. Vincent Boussard's Toulouse production (Opus Arte), another economical staging but with Christian Lacroix's stylish costumes, has Ludovic Tézier as a suitably aristocratic Alphonse. From the Bavarian State Opera (DG), Amélie Niermeyer updates the action and draws terrific dramatic performances from Elina Garanča, Matthew Polenzani and Mariusz Kwiecień. Both are preferable to Florence's pedestrian production. **Mark Pullinger**

Selected comparisons:

Allemandi (6/15) (OPAR)

OA1166D; OABD7165D

Chichon (DG) 073 5358GH2; 073 5359GH

Handel



Agrippina

Patricia Bardon *mez*..... Agrippina
Jake Arditti *counterten* Nerone
Danielle de Niese *sop* Poppea
Mika Kares *bass* Claudio
Filippo Mineccia *counterten* Ottone
Damien Pass *bass-bar* Pallante
Tom Verney *counterten* Mago Narciso
Christoph Seidl *bass* Lesbo

Balthasar Neumann Ensemble /

Thomas Hengelbrock

Stage director **Robert Carsen**

Video director **François Roussillon**

Naxos (F) ② 2 110579/80; (F) NBD0078V

(179' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS-HD MA5.1, DTS5.1 & PCM stereo • 0 • s)

Recorded live at the Theater an der Wien, Vienna, March 16 & 29, 2016

Includes synopsis



Robert Carsen's production of *Agrippina* (Venice, 1709), filmed across two performances at the Theater an der

Wien in March 2016, is a paradox that is simultaneously sophisticated and clumsy, often insightful but frequently vexing for ubiquitous clichés in its approach. Placing only one interval in the middle of Act 2 displaces the original and careful structure and pacing of the three-act drama. Important features of the text are lamentably bowdlerised; the exchanges between characters in the lead-up to the unjustly scorned Ottone's soliloquy 'Voi che udite' are not only considerably cut down but also reshuffled to give Poppea more prominence. There are some other unfortunate cuts, most regrettably the omission of Ottone's lovely little continuo aria 'Tacerò' (a common mistake that ought not be made). There is a predictable subversion of the *lieto fine* presented by the final chorus: we see Nero ordering the murders of everyone else and cackling insanely as Rome burns – as if the audience did not know that his becoming Claudius's successor turned out to be a bad thing.

On the other hand, Carsen presents characters, their interactions and motivations with cleverness, wit and flawless timing. The production juggles political and sexual scheming, comedy and seriousness in consistently entertaining and compelling action that only resorts to superficial farce when it is called for – in Act 3 the successive visits of three frustrated lovers hiding from each other in Poppea's bedroom is hilariously done (despite the cuts), and the next scene cuts to a fantastic visual gag of the despairing Agrippina watching it all unfold on CCTV footage (less bothered by Claudius's attempted infidelity than by her foolish



An opera to amuse and charm: Mayr's *Che originali!* is aptly presented alongside *Pigmalione* by his pupil Donizetti – see review on page 93

son Nero's botching his chances of being named as the emperor's successor). Set in an environment that is a bit like *The West Wing* transplanted into Fascist Rome of the 1930s (Claudius is blatantly Mussolini), a lot of the technical and artistic qualities of the production work incredibly well.

Patricia Bardon plays the scheming title-role with deviousness and sexual energy. Mika Kares's Claudius is boorish, pompous, childish and nasty. Jake Arditti portrays Nero with spirited animation and comic absurdity. Poppea's development from shallowness and gullibility to vulnerability and wisdom is acted wonderfully by Danielle de Niese (her singing is a mixed bag). Filippo Mineccia is a magnetic and versatile stage performer as the honourable yet naive Ottone; his singing is occasionally hard-edged, but an inserted love duet (rejected by Handel) proving the sincerity of his relationship with Poppea is sensitively done. Thomas Hengelbrock's full-blooded conducting of the Balthasar Neumann Ensemble has theatrical acumen and is vividly sonorous whether sweet, dark, seductive or furious. Although quick music crackles vigorously, briskness is often at the expense of detail.

David Vickers

Holten

Gesualdo Shadows

Gert Henning-Jensen *ten*.....Carlo Gesualdo

Tor Lind *bar*.....Shadow

Hanna Kappelin *sop*.....Maria d'Avalos

Rasmus Kure Thomsen *bass*.....Fabrizio Carafa

Guido Paevatalu *bass*.....Duke of Ferrara

Ann-Christin Wesser Ingels *sop*.....Leonora d'Este

Anders Jakobsson *bass*.....Fontanelli

Musica Ficta; Concerto Copenhagen / Bo Holten

Stage director **Deda Cristina Colonna**

Video direction **Cubus Film**

Dacapo © **DVD** 2 110428 (114' • NTSC • 16:9 • DTS5.0 & PCM stereo • 0 • s)

Recorded live at the Funen Opera, Odense, November 4, 2016

Includes synopsis



The year 2017 may have delivered the first opera about Claudio Monteverdi (at least according to the creators of *La tragedia di Claudio M*) but this work by the Danish composer and conductor Bo Holten, first seen in Odense in November 2016, adds to a colossal list of operas that take Carlo Gesualdo as their subject. Holten's opera, to a libretto by his former wife Eva

Sommestad Holten, focuses more on the composer's mental demise and musical imagination than on the murder of his unfaithful spouse, which Holten describes as 'nothing extraordinary' given the social context. That act does figure, and dramatically so. But the presence of an elusive Nick Shadow-like character acting as Gesualdo's conscience, confidant and musical assistant means we're more inside the composer's head than objectively watching the events of his life play out.

We get a straightforward narrative in which the three acts equate to three chapters in the composer's life: his first marriage in Act 1; his second marriage (no murder in that one) and musically stimulating time in Ferrara in Act 2; and his return home, his descent into madness and death in Act 3.

We are shown a figure in constant suffering, paranoid to the point of arrogance about his creative legacy and ultimately too obsessed with music to allow meaningful human relationships to take root.

Writing music about music is dangerous, especially in the theatre. Holten doesn't just neutralise the problem; he gives his opera all its charm by rooting it in the music in question. His own specialist vocal septet *Musica Ficta* appear as a chorus, primarily occupied with straight (but highly

idiomatic) performances of seven Gesualdo madrigals (mostly from the seminal Fourth and Sixth books) and two motets; the drama is at its keenest when Gesualdo himself, Gert Henning-Jensen, is railing over the top of these works in his fulsome operatic tenor. The rest of the cast are 'standard' opera singers too, while Concerto Copenhagen (with added oboe and sackbuts to make it 'Gesualdo-odd') play an often enchanting score on period instruments, born of the expression of the time (full of spirited dances) but with a slightly freer harmonic rein and a touch of stern Lutheran melancholy. Much of the music is improvised to figured bass.

While the benefit of Holten's experience conducting Gesualdo's own music is huge, there is something occasionally odd and ill-fitting about his English text-setting that I can't quite put my finger on (it may be the unease of hearing English words in such a distinctively Italian idiom). Even with the frequent interjection of the madrigal group, textures can feel overly uniform; but Holten knows how to generate a theatrical climax and there is a thrilling one in Act 3 when Gesualdo is told he is to be sued.

As usual, Henning-Jensen is unflinchingly puppyish, in bright and thrilling voice and wholly committed, but unable to reveal much under the immediate surface emotions of this complex character. He is well supported by Tor Lind as the Mephistopheles-like Shadow and the rest of the seven-strong operatic cast. But given that the Funen Opera's auditorium is a black box, and the fact that the band is effectively on stage, it would have made a world of difference to have altered the lighting for this DVD filming, perhaps even shot it in studio conditions without an audience. As it is, what we see on screen is relentlessly dark, colourless and punctuated by many awkward comings and goings.

Andrew Mellor

Lehár

Das Land des Lächelns

Piotr Beczala *ten* Prince Sou-Chong
Julia Kleiter *sop* Lisa
Rebeca Olvera *sop* Mi
Spencer Lang *ten* Count Gustav von Pottenstein
Cheyne Davidson *bar* Tschang
Martin Zysset *ten* Chief Eunuch
Chorus of Zurich Opera; Philharmonia Zurich / Fabio Luisi

Stage director **Andreas Homoki**

Video director **Michael Beyer**

Accentus © DVD ACC20435; © Blu-ray ACC10435

(103' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS-HS MA5.1,

DTS5.1 & PCM stereo • 0 • s)

Recorded live, June 2017



'My dear Richard! Here you have your Tauber-Lied!!' scribbled Franz Lehár on the score of 'Dein ist mein ganzes Herz', the showstopping Act 2 tenor aria from his 1929 operetta *Das Land des Lächelns*. The point endures: this was conceived as Richard Tauber's show. Lehár was writing for both the voice and the superstar charisma of one of the greatest singers of his era. For today's operetta fan, chance would be a fine thing.

So a release like this is enough to prompt tears of gratitude. If you own Piotr Beczala's 2014 Tauber tribute album, you'll have dreamed of hearing him sing the complete role of Prince Sou-Chong; and now here he is, in this radiantly performed and gloriously stylish Zurich Opera production from Andreas Homoki. Let me say at the outset that this is a magnificent achievement: a staging that lets the piece speak eloquently for itself, performed with a sense of style that's faithful without being patronising.

Homoki's approach is to ground *Das Land des Lächelns* in the aesthetic of its own time. Orientalism is confined to Sou-Chong's yellow jacket and the glittering red cheongsams of Wolfgang Gussmann and Susana Mendoza's costume designs. Instead, the visuals evoke a Hollywood musical of the early '30s: top hats, tails and a sweeping Busby Berkeley staircase on a gleaming black and gold art deco sound stage. The curtain closes to separate public display from private emotion – a central theme of this culture-clash tragedy, heightened by the mask that Sou-Chong wears in his official capacity.

I found the puppet-theatre styling of Homoki's *Gramophone* Award-winning *Wozzeck* alienating but here the artificiality concentrates the emotion. You see the precise instant when Mi (a sparky, sunny Rebeca Olvera) and Gustl (Spencer Lang, a properly dapper comic tenor) realise that their love is hopeless; before then we've witnessed Beczala and his Lisa (Julia Kleiter) in a savagely sincere Act 2 finale. Kleiter's singing has a really glamorous gleam throughout; together with Beczala the pair articulate their emotional conflict as painfully and as persuasively as if they're singing Puccini. Beczala's 'Dein ist mein ganzes Herz' is as wrenching as you'd hope; the pair's earlier love scenes have a weightless delicacy and tenderness.

For that, of course, much credit has to go to Fabio Luisi, who brings out textures

ranging from Straussian lushness to Ravel-like chinoiserie and lets the music breathe and flow, delivering Viennese *Schwung* as required but also a sense of line and a passionate urgency that evokes *Turandot* and *Rosenkavalier* by turns. If there's been a more ravishingly played new operetta recording this century, I haven't heard it. Reservations? Well, Homoki cuts almost all the spoken dialogue and several minor characters. I'm uneasy with a concept that erases Lehár's librettists – all three of whom died under Nazi persecution – from their own work; it also creates non sequiturs in the narrative, and reduces Mi and Gustl's relationship to little more than a couple of comic duets. Homoki elides the three acts, and the English subtitles are stiff and riddled with typos. There are a couple of minor intonation wobbles.

But by telling the story almost entirely through the musical numbers, Homoki shapes a drama whose emotional directness will astonish those who think Lehár was a mere purveyor of escapism, and which should make new friends for this troubling, genuinely moving masterpiece of Lehár's gorgeous late period. Operetta lovers, meanwhile, could hardly hope for a finer modern account. **Richard Bratby**

Loder

Raymond and Agnes

Mark Milhofer *ten* Raymond
Majella Cullagh *sop* Agnes
Andrew Greenan *bass-bar* Baron of Lindenberg
Carolyn Dobbin *mez* Madelina
Quentin Hayes *bar* Antoni
Alessandro Fisher *ten* Theodore
Alexander Robin Baker *bar* Francesco
Timothy Langston *ten* Landlord
Retrospect Opera Chorus; Royal Ballet Sinfonia / Richard Bonyngne

Retrospect Opera © ② RO005 (149' • DDD)

Includes synopsis and libretto



Raymond and Agnes.
 The title doesn't exactly trip off the tongue, nor does it

readily suggest an atmosphere of mystery and romance. Yet, in fact, Edward Loder's opera is in many respects quintessentially Romantic, with a plot that's practically a catalogue of that era's conventions: curses, bandits, ghosts, marksmen, sleepwalkers and rival suitors. I would say that the title does at least honestly reflect the awkwardness of Edward Fitzball's overwrought libretto. Take, for instance, the text for a chorus of bandits at the opening of Act 3: 'Play!

play! fight for the game / The dicebox manfully, manfully rattle. / Wine! wine! the triumph proclaim / Of him who winneth the battle.' Can we blame Loder for failing to make musical magic from such inelegant verses? It's not the only dullish number, but the score has an abundance of magical moments, too, which makes Loder's achievement all the more impressive.

Raymond and Agnes is based rather loosely on *The Monk*, Matthew Lewis's 1796 Gothic novel, with bits of Weber's *Der Freischütz* mixed in. The story is so convoluted that I can only give the most cursory summary. The villainous Baron of Lindenberg wants to marry his young ward, Agnes, in order to end a old curse, but Agnes falls in love with Raymond. The lovers plan to elope but their plans are thwarted. Raymond discovers that the Baron was responsible for destroying his family long ago. The Baron's plan to have Raymond murdered is eventually frustrated and the Baron himself is shot, leaving the young couple free to wed. Oh, and at the end Raymond is reunited with his mute mother, who suddenly regains the ability to speak.

The opera was first performed in Manchester in 1855 and ran for seven performances. An 1859 London production ran for 10, then the work disappeared until 1966, when Nicholas Temperley mounted a critically acclaimed revival in Cambridge (his is one of three excellent scholarly essays included in the booklet). Richard Bonyngé, in a prefatory note, admits he was surprised to discover such 'skilful music', noting that, if Loder's gifts as a melodist don't quite match those of Wallace or Balfe, his dramatic sense is 'first-rate' and his orchestration 'inspired'.

The first number in which I sense Loder's inspiration taking wing is Raymond's Act 1 aria 'Angels roam abroad tonight', with its ornate, flitting melody

and exquisite orchestral colours. Loder lavishes even more care in fleshing out the character of the Baron, who is repentant for his misdeeds but desperate to end the curse through marriage to Agnes. The Baron's recitative and aria in the first scene of Act 2 reveal his internal struggles in music that seamlessly alternates agitation and aspiration. And, indeed, it's in Act 2 that Loder's dramatic grip is most sure. He gradually ratchets up the tension in the confrontation between Raymond and the Baron. There's a marvellous play of light and shade in the nocturnal second scene, making what could easily have been a drearily clichéd Gothic spook show into something richly atmospheric. This all culminates in the brilliant yet delicate quintet 'Lost, and in a dream' – the melodic lines seemingly floating over flickering, candlelit clouds of accompaniment.

The performance is mostly very good. Bonyngé is an old hand in this area of the repertory, of course. A few numbers sound under-rehearsed and I occasionally wished for a bit more pep – that bandit's chorus at the start of Act 3, for example – but the spirit is never in question. As far as the singers go, Mark Milhofer's Raymond is the standout: sweet-toned, ardent and agile. It's been more than 20 years since Majella Cullagh recorded the title-role in Wallace's *Maritana* and her voice now shows obvious signs of wear. She's an effective heroine, however, and ably charts Agnes's development from demure maiden to battle-scarred adult. Andrew Greenan's tone can be woolly and his legato sometimes leads to ungainliness, but his Baron still commands centre stage.

For anyone with an interest in 19th-century opera, this is a major release. Kudos to Retrospect Opera for putting it all together – and in superb sound, to boot.

Andrew Farach-Colton

Mayr

Che originali!

Bruno de Simone *bar* Don Febeo
Chiara Amarù *mez* Donna Aristeo
Leonardo Cortellazzi *ten* Don Carolino
Angela Nisi *sop* Donna Rosina
Omar Montanari *bar* Biscroma
Gioia Crepaldi *sop* Celestina
Pietro Di Bianco *bass-bar* Carluccio

Donizetti

Pigmalione

Antonino Siragusa *ten* Pigmalione
Aya Wakizono *mez* Galatea
Orchestra of La Scala / Gianluca Capuano

Stage director **Roberto Catalano**

Video director **Matteo Ricchetti**

Dynamic (F) (2) CDS7811; (F) DVD 37811; (F) Blu-ray 57811
 (145' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS-HD MA5.1, DD5.1 & PCM stereo • O • s)

Recorded live at the Teatro Sociale, Bergamo, 2017

Includes synopsis



This is a very apt pairing, as Giovanni Simone Mayr (born Johann Simon Mayr) was one of Donizetti's teachers, who did much

to encourage the younger man at the outset of his career. The latter's *Pigmalione* comes first on the CD set but it's *Che originali!* that is the more significant piece: not surprising, as Mayr was already a mature composer at the time of its first performance in Venice in 1798, whereas Donizetti was only 18 when he composed *Pigmalione*.

Che originali! was later performed under various titles, including *La musicomania* and *Il fanatico per la musica*. The story has echoes of *Il barbiere di Siviglia* – not Rossini's, which lay far in the future, but, most probably, the setting by Paisiello. Don Febeo, the Doctor Bartolo analogue, is a fussy old father obsessed with music, while Biscroma ('Demisemiquaver') is the resourceful

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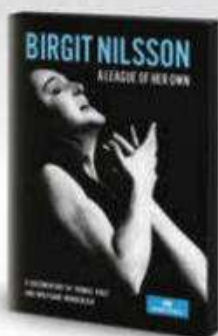


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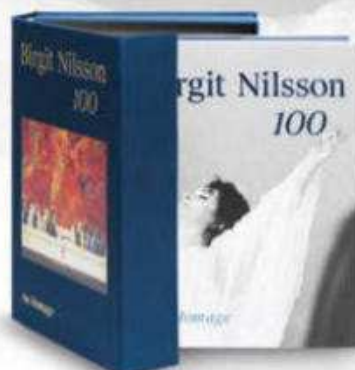
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servant. There is even a Rosina, but it's her sister Aristeia who is loved by the count, Don Carolino. Febeo rejects Carolino as a prospective son-in-law because he can't play a single musical instrument. Later, Biscroma presents the disguised Carolino to his master as the new secretary; but Carolino fails his dictation test, which is of music not words, after which he is unmasked and expelled. Finally, Biscroma introduces the Count in another disguise as the distinguished composer Semiminima: Febeo falls for the trick and immediately offers him Aristeia's hand in marriage.

It's perhaps a little heavy to point out the flaws in the plot: you would expect Carolino to reveal his identity at the end, while Rosina, the hypochondriac other daughter, is virtually written out of the action after her aria. Better to sit back and enjoy the piece as it pokes good-natured fun at the world of opera. When her father queries the style of her get-up, Aristeia name-checks the heroines of Metastasio's librettos, to which she is devoted: Dido, Semiramis, Zenobia ... Febeo compares himself to Pergolesi and Jommelli; for his contribution – an accompanied recitative and aria – to a new opera on *Don Quixote*, Mayr provides him with a parody of *opera seria*. In general, the music is of its time – like Cimarosa, perhaps, and Mozart, including a quote of Figaro's 'Se vuol ballare' – but the patter duet at the start of the finale looks forward to Rossini and, indeed, Donizetti.

Ilaria Ariemme's costumes are monochrome for the women, extravagantly polychromatic for the men. The cast is splendidly led by Bruno de Simone, a comedian not unlike Alessandro Corbelli. Chiara Amarù and Angela Nisi are well contrasted as the sisters, both vocally and in character, and Leonardo Cortellazzi makes a game Don Carolino. Add Gioia Crepaldi as the servant Celestina yearning for marriage, and Omar Montanari's Biscroma on women's infidelity – more like Mozart's good-humoured Guglielmo than his Figaro, despite the cuckold's horns in the orchestra – and you have an opera, and a performance, that will amuse and charm.

Lasting an hour and three quarters, Mayr's *farsa per musica* is a long one-act. Donizetti's *Pigmalione*, a *scena lirica*, clocks up less than 40 minutes. Composed in 1816, it wasn't performed until 1960. In a sequence of accompanied recitatives and arias the sculptor Pygmalion expresses his despairing love for Galatea, his own creation. She comes to life and they embrace. Antonino Siragusa, in suit and tie, is an unlikely-looking artist but he gives a touching performance. Aya Wakizono has to act in dumb show until she sings at the

very end. The music is attractive, with some delicate writing for the woodwind. Gianluca Capuano conducts both operas with spirit. Well worth investigating. **Richard Lawrence**

Rossini

Aureliano in Palmira

Juan Francisco Gatell *ten*.....Aureliano
Silvia Dalla Benetta *sop*.....Zenobia
Marina Viotti *mez*.....Arsace
Ana Victória Pitts *mez*.....Publia
Xiang Xu *ten*.....Oraspe
Zhiyuan Chen *bass*.....Licinio
Baurzhan Anderzhanov *bass*..... High Priest of Isis
Camerata Bach Choir, Poznań; Virtuosi Brunensis / José Miguel Pérez-Sierra
 Naxos © ③ 8 660448/50 (167' • DDD)
 Recorded live at the Trinkhalle, Bad Wildbad, Germany, July 12, 14 & 22, 2017
 Italian libretto available from naxos.com



The ancient Roman city of Palmyra has been a good deal in the news this past decade. And so, curiously, has the young Rossini's opera on the city's conquest in 272AD, when the Emperor Aurelian, tired of the insurgencies of Palmyra's fractious Queen Zenobia, decided to intervene.

Rossini wrote the opera for La Scala, Milan, at the end of a year which had brought him Europe-wide acclaim with that loveliest of all his early works, the heroic melodrama *Tancredi*. Though *Aureliano in Palmira* has always sat somewhat in *Tancredi*'s shade (no 'hit' number to match 'Di tanti palpiti'), it has its own charm and allure, as is clearly recognised by José Miguel Pérez-Sierra, conductor of this appropriately alert and gracious 2017 Rossini in Wildbad revival.

Aureliano is one of only three Rossini operas for which no manuscript survives. The new performance, like the 2012 Opera Rara account, uses the very serviceable Peters Edition. It is a shorter and less richly elaborated version of the opera than that which we have in Will Crutchfield's Critical Edition and on the DVD of the successful staging of that edition at the 2014 Rossini Festival in Pesaro.

The title-role is curious in as much as Rossini wrote the first act for the young coloratura tenor Giovanni David and the second act for a less gifted singer who stepped in when David fell ill. Juan Francisco Gatell, a commanding Aureliano, is equally at home in both parts. The role of Arsace, a former ally of Rome, now Zenobia's lover, was added to the historical narrative by Rossini and his librettist Felice Romani

as a vehicle for the famously flamboyant 34-year-old castrato Giovan Battista Velluti. These days it's a well-liked mezzo role nicely sung here by Marina Viotti.

The Zenobia, Silvia Dalla Benetta, though secure in her middle registers and vivid in recitative, doesn't command all the firepower the character demands. But, then, this too is a curious role; a lovelorn warrior queen created by Rossini for a locally acclaimed Zerlina and Queen of the Night. It's in Zenobia's big Act 1 aria 'Là pugnai' that Benetta is outshone by Catriona Smith (Opera Rara) and by Jessica Pratt, who uses Pesaro's fuller text.

That said, all three principals work well together. There are also strong performances in the small but important *comprimario* roles of the High Priest (the Kazakh bass Baurzhan Anderzhanov) and Aureliano's self-sacrificing daughter Publia (Ana Victória Pitts). Minor drawbacks include some overweening fortepiano-playing in the recitatives and the live recording's distant placing of the chorus at the start of the opera and in the lovely pastoral interlude in Act 2.

The DVDs of the distinguished Pesaro staging offer the more complete experience but, at nearly a third of the price of its Opera Rara rival, this new Naxos set provides an affordable introduction to a very collectable Rossini rarity. **Richard Osborne**

Selected comparisons:

Benini (12/12) (OPRA) ORC46

Crutchfield (A/15) (ARTH) DVD 109 073

Wagner

Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg

Michael Volle *bar*.....Hans Sachs
Johannes Martin Kränzle *bar*.....Beckmesser
Klaus Florian Vogt *ten*.....Walther
Anne Schwanewilms *sop*.....Eva
Wibke Lehmkuhl *contr*.....Magdalene
Daniel Behle *ten*.....David
Günther Groissböck *bass*.....Pogner
Bayreuth Festival Chorus and Orchestra / Philippe Jordan

Stage director **Barrie Kosky**

Video director **Michael Beyer**

DG © ② DVD 073 5450GH2; © ③ 0735453GH
 (4h 43' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS-HD MA5.0,
 DTS5.0 & PCM stereo • 0 • s)

Recorded live 2017

Includes synopsis



In Barrie Kosky's spirited but uneven 2017 staging of Wagner's comedy there are splurges of ideas. The performance emerges from the frame of a fictional at-home in Wahnfried where Wagner himself becomes

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Birgit Nilsson in one of her signature roles, as Brünnhilde in Wagner's Ring at Bayreuth

Birgit Nilsson

'The Great Live Recordings'

Bartók Duke Bluebeard's Castle **Beethoven** Fidelio **Puccini** Turandot **R Strauss** Elektra (two recordings). Die Frau ohne Schatten. Salome **Wagner** Götterdämmerung - Immolation scene (two recordings). Lohengrin. Siegfried - Heil dir, Sonne!. Tristan und Isolde (three recordings). Tristan und Isolde - Liebestod. Die Walküre. Die Walküre - Schlafst du, Gast? Ich bin's!

Birgit Nilsson sop

Sony Classical © (31 discs) 88985 39232-2

Recorded 1953-76



Collectors certainly wanted more than Decca could provide of this year's centenarian Birgit

Nilsson, an undoubted recording star of the great age of the stereo LP. Indeed, all of the 17 performances (12 of them complete) collected here have appeared before in some form, or condition, as 'private' or 'pirate' issue recordings. The sonic improvements now made by Sony to these original releases are often considerable and their selection is both logical and satisfying.

The calling card of a live (and open-air) 1973 **Tristan und Isolde** is the chance to

hear Nilsson in her favourite role alongside Jon Vickers. At the start here audience chatter and picnic rustling seriously rival Karl Böhm's gentle first placing of the famous chord. But after that it's all gain as both his conducting and the cleaned-up recording spread themselves to accommodate the Orange acoustic in a performance worth acquiring now despite local difficulties. You can hear now, alongside the heroics, how sensitive, romantic and pained Vickers's Tristan is, how strong and committed are the supporting cast – not least Walter Berry's blindly faithful servant Kurwenal. And how Nilsson's 'loving Isolde' – Wieland Wagner's sobriquet – now informs her whole reading of the part, still vibrant top notes included. (Incidentally, Sony, the Steersman's name is Paul Taillefer.)

The 1965 Metropolitan Opera **Salome** is hot. If you thought the (still remarkable) Decca studio version of some years before was a classic example of Glenn Gould's 'constructive cheating' theory of recording, you'll be surprised. Nilsson can do it all live, including some of the teenage-girl voice – as heard too on the Decca – that made Maria Cebotari's assumption of the role so ghoulish. The Herods (Karl Liebl/Irene Dalis) and Narraboth (George Shirley no less)

are both strong and unguyed, while Böhm has the orchestra at a thrilling pitch of both ensemble and wildness of colour.

The **Elektras**, two of them, are hardly less essential. The Vienna State Opera's guest appearance at the 1967 Montreal EXPO starts distantly in what sounds like a studio with the reverberation left on, a strange cavern of an acoustic. But, apart from the timpani, it is soon tamed effectively by the 'restoration' engineers Othmar Eichinger and Harald Huber (their work is on most of this box-set) and the ear adjusts. This is an early performance of the role by Nilsson, excitable and vengeance-filled (as is her conductor's), not unlike the Decca recording of less than a year before. Regina Resnik's Klytemnestra is also present from that cast to give a portrait of the murderous queen to match her original. The Montreal crowd love her to the point of interjecting an ovation when they think she's exiting. The remainder of the cast, Viennese company soloists all, give palpable special-occasion support. As recorded here, Böhm sounds more violent and loud than in his other traceable performances.

Nearly four years later the Met *Elektra* showcases another example of the most thorough orchestral preparation and delivery by the maestro, a more cumulative approach to the character by Nilsson and a peppy contribution by an obviously inspired Thomas Stewart. The smaller roles lack the familiar confidence of their Viennese equivalents in Montreal although an apparently sick Jean Madeira manages a gripping psychological portrait of Klytemnestra. It's a more organised, better-sounding occasion than the EXPO tour and might be your choice if you want this conductor and soprano together in this work.

A Böhm/Nilsson *Tristan* from Vienna has Jess Thomas as the tenor lead, a 1967 pre-Christmas evening at the Staatsoper with a solidly experienced cast. Thomas's passion and obvious intelligence with the text (but uneven tone production) does not always quite equal the achievements of his diva and conductor – he's better at being neurotic than in love (Act 3 and the end of Act 1 are more in focus than Act 2). Nilsson and Böhm – who have by this time been working this opera for six successive Bayreuth Festival summers – are playing off each other beautifully: try

their Liebestod, which is like a Lieder recital in its natural-sounding exchanges of colour and mood. And clearly an achievement post the one DG recorded at Bayreuth in 1966.

Turn immediately (if you can) to the Bayreuth performance under Wolfgang Sawallisch from a decade before. This is Nilsson's real Bayreuth debut in a role suited to her more than the efficient but bloodless Elsa (here from 1954 under Jochum) and the plucky but overweight Sieglinde (also here, from 1957 under Knappertsbusch), both the latter roles handed out when Wieland Wagner wrongly thought she was the next Maria Müller and insufficiently dramatic for Brünnhilde. The Isolde (which she had sung elsewhere) is already working well although it lacks the detail of later – reactions are more conventional princess-in-the-lead – and Sawallisch sounds to be accommodating her with skill rather than collaborating. Here, one year before the version released by Orfeo (A/18), this conductor is already cunningly moulding his minimalist Wagner sonorities to a music drama bigger than the early Romantic operas. Despite all the ifs and buts, this first joint outing for Nilsson and Wolfgang Windgassen (the Festival's *Liebespaar* from now until 1970) is an unpredictably exciting evening.

The Karajan **Die Walküre** at the Met is professional but resolutely unthrilling – a show that has remained famous for Nilsson's rehearsal joke in protesting stage director Karajan's low-level lighting with a lit-up miner's helmet. At least Karajan as repetiteur was in good form, securing a fine result from the orchestra and even getting his reluctantly chosen diva Nilsson (details in Thomas Voigt's not otherwise over-informative booklet note) to sound younger and more girlish, like his first choice Régine Crespin, who's here as Sieglinde. Everyone sings and plays at the right times but, for example, Vickers's Siegmund – so alive in the DG recording and Salzburg tapes – projects everything very safely and Theo Adam sounds like he's watching the maestro the whole time.

A live 1976 **Die Frau ohne Schatten** makes a companion for and contrast to the existing DG Böhm recording. The Dyer's Wife was the last new role that Nilsson took on at a late career stage as well as the nearest to a character role. This very live performance finds her in spiky and lively partnership with Fischer-Dieskau's Barak, most attentive to text

and admirably wary of clichéd off-the-voice dramatics. And it's a real collector's item to have three great Nordic Wagnerians together – Nilsson, Ingrid Bjoner (Empress) and Astrid Varnay (Nurse). Sawallisch's conducting is ever fluent and pacy but his preference for lighter sonorities can sound a little penny plain in this score.

A collection disc of three Wagner concert items is memorable for Sergiu Celibidache's expansive and detailed handling of the *Tristan* Verklärung and Stig Rybrant's of Nilsson in a very early (1953), very straight *Götterdämmerung* Immolation scene in Swedish, which sounds in this context almost like a Nordic original version of Wagner's text.

The three non-Wagner/Strauss items are all superb, due in no small part to their conductors. The Swedish premiere of Bartók's **Duke Bluebeard's Castle** (sung in German) teamed Nilsson with Bernhard Sönnnerstedt under the suitably dark and moody baton of Ferenc Fricsay. She sings strongly, straightforwardly and truly (and the climactic reaction to the Fifth Door, which we're all waiting for, is predictably electrifying). Bernstein's **Fidelio** for Rome Radio – his first try-out of the whole score – is grippingly held together and follows much the same dynamic path as his DG recording, ie a chamber opera until Pizarro comes, then baleful music drama. Nilsson is much freer and more at one with the text than in her famous early recording with Erich Kleiber.

Lastly, and very not leastly, the epochal Stokowski Met **Turandot** finally gets official mass release blessing. Aside from the colossal vocal battle between Nilsson and Franco Corelli (both on great form if a little careful of the conducting), there's Anna Moffo's absolute nonpareil of a sensual Liù (just her first 'mi hai sorriso' is overwhelming) and the maestro conducting the work like a key early 20th-century score, the orchestra bravely following his many tempo adjustments. A great triumph whose fearless vocalism and imaginative conducting even redeems Alfano's blatant ending.

The complete set's booklet has full performance tracking details and synopses but not nearly enough on the actual performances. The release makes for a courageous complement and alternative to (but not a substitute for) this year's earlier release of the soprano's commercial studio recordings. **G**

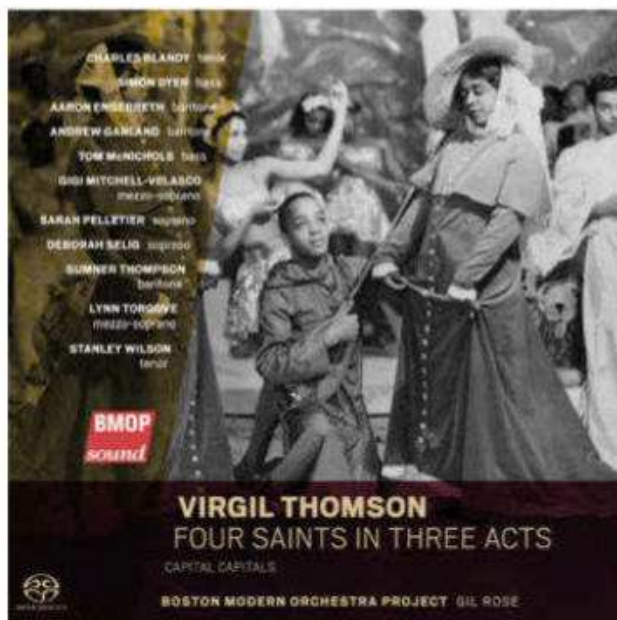
Sachs and Walther (and a bit David), Cosima Eva, Liszt Pogner and Hermann Levi Beckmesser. It's all very 'Carry On Richard', a mode continued when medieval pantomime-dressed Masters emerge from the piano. At the end of Act 1 a 1940s American military policeman is suddenly on guard and some scenic adjustments hint that we are in another Nuremburg, the court where the post-Second World War trials took place.

Act 2 is set on a grassy field and briefly returns Sachs and Eva to their original frame characters. But the act's climax, apart from some skilful direction and 'blocking' of the often autopilot Sachs/Eva, Eva/Walther and Sachs/Beckmesser dialogues, puts the production back in sync with a now almost obligatory show of anti-Semitic treatment towards Beckmesser. This riot becomes a crudely staged pogrom with big inflatable Jewish head and face mask squarely aimed at the Marker.

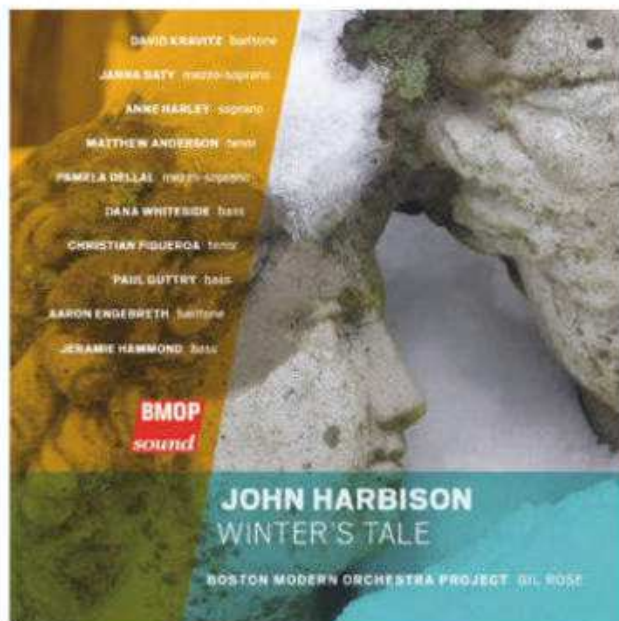
Act 3 plays in the Nuremburg trial court room and the Festwiese showcases more pantomime medieval costumes and the American soldier guard as symbolic reference. Unfortunately it's pedestrianly staged, including aged Jewish demons teasing Beckmesser, although the 'blessed' Quintet is saved by the emotional energy of Schwanewilms's Eva – a constant throughout. The Festwiese dance sections are a particular desert of ideas and banal flag-waving. Then, after Walther's refusal to be a Master, the stage is cleared apart from Sachs on the trial stand. The chorus re-emerge on a truck from upstage dressed as a performing orchestra and chorus for him to conduct the final pages.

Generally popular with both press and public, the result now seems like a messy missed opportunity. But there's working time to come and Kosky, no intellectual slouch in his 'day job' at Berlin's Komische Oper, could rebalance his strategies and paint in work that's not yet finished. The performances of the cast are of a high standard dramatically and mostly musically. Volle now paces himself well and Lehmkuhl is a magical and unclichéd Magdalene but you may long for more body in Walther's voice than Vogt's familiar angelic tones can manage. Philippe Jordan relates pit carefully to stage without finding anything markedly individual. On rival DVDs you will find two more conventional Bayreuth productions from Wolfgang Wagner (conducted by Stein on DG, and Barenboim – EuroArts, A/08) and one far less from his daughter Katharina (Weigle – Opus Arte, 3/11); for a middle road, look for the Götz Friedrich/Frühbeck de Burgos Deutsche Oper recording (Arthaus, 4/01). **Mike Ashman**

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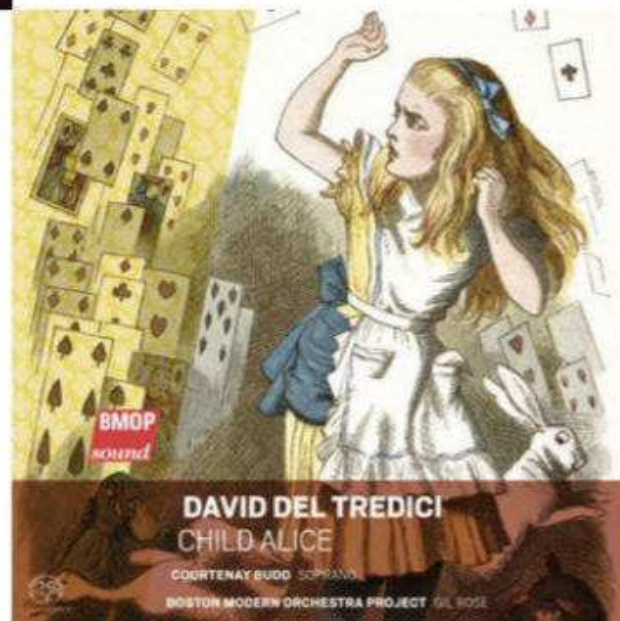
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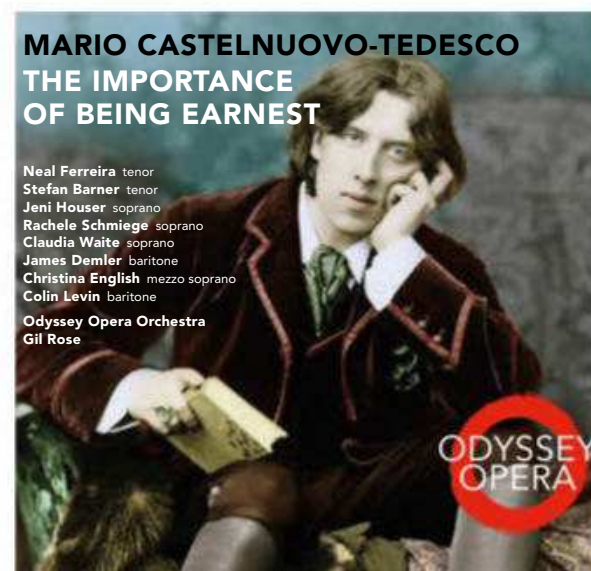
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Wolfgang Muthspiel

Where The River Goes
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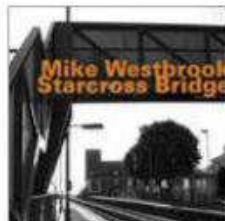


With *Rising Grace* in 2016, the Austrian guitarist Wolfgang Muthspiel confirmed his stature on the world stage all the more firmly – Brad Mehldau was his pianist, Ambrose Akinmusire his trumpeter, long-time Mehldau collaborator Larry Grenadier was on bass. *Where The River Goes* is the next chapter, with the same band save for the idiosyncratic Eric Harland coming in for the comparably exciting Brian Blade on drums. Though Muthspiel albums incline nowadays toward a mix of solo meditations and probing collective speculations over nailed-down grooves, there's a good enough balance of both for this set to intrigue both freefall-

jazz voyagers and pursuers of blues and leftfield perceptions of swing. Several tracks have solo guitar or piano intros, but Muthspiel's soft, latin-strummed opening to the title-track turns into an evocatively Kenny Wheeler-reminiscent piece following Akinmusire's yearning statement of the theme. It's as classy a session as the personnel would imply, if extendedly pensive at times. **John Fordham**

Mike Westbrook

Starcross Bridge
hatOLOGY © 754



Wait 40 years for a solo piano recording from Mike Westbrook, then stone me two come along virtually at once. *Starcross Bridge* is, if it's at all possible, even more intimate and elusive than 2016's *Paris*. Like

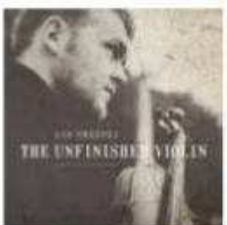
Jarrett's *The Melody at Night with You*, the music is almost too personal, too heartfelt to open up its secrets. We hear through a veil, often of tears. And yet it is in that witnessing of an artist easing yet pleading, sometimes blithely at one with his art, at others challenged and defeated, that the beauty and strength prevails. As Philip Clark's wise notes suggest, there's something painterly in Westbrook's approach: each track is complete in itself (though some segue into others), yet, like late Turners, they are also suggestive rather than solid, to an airy suspended thinness: chords, Messiaen-like, hover and decay, melodies elide and fall. *Starcross Bridge* is a rail crossing close to the Westbrook's Dawlish home. One side the sea, on the other a cosy pub. And that's what this release brings us: wide wild vistas on one side, hunkered down delight, warm with detail on the other. **Andy Robson**

World Music

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Sam Sweeney

The Unfinished Violin
Mighty Village Records/Island © 6769254



Sam Sweeney's Fiddle: Made in the Great War show toured from 2014 to last year, and he has chosen that same World War I fiddle, made by a music hall performer in Leeds, recovered from an Oxford violin shop and played on innumerable gigs, to be the focus of his debut solo album. It features a swelling, stately tune called 'The Wellesley', from the Duke of Wellington's West Riding Regiment, of which Sweeney's violin maker, Richard Howard, was a member up until his death at the Battle of Messines in 1917. Sweeney played it over Howard's grave in 2017; he says the emotion was overwhelming, and that is the general tenor

of this outstanding album. It comprises 16 pieces to mark the centenary of the war's end, ranging from Scottish pipe tunes to popular dances and marches that began their lives in civvies before being inveigled into the military. Sweeney's playing is unearthly at times: the singular focus of this set and the level of its performance makes this an outstanding and deeply moving experience.

Tim Cumming

Small Island Big Song

Small Island © SIBS-0001



A little idea that's grown into a large project, *Small Island Big Song* is the brainchild of Australian sound producer and filmmaker Tim Cole and his Taiwanese partner BaoBao Chen. The original concept evolved into a three-year journey to 16

Pacific and Indian Ocean island nations, acoustically recording indigenous musicians in natural settings, and layering their collaborative contributions together in a cultural mash-up. Based on the Austronesian migration theory that many present-day Oceanic cultures originated in Taiwan, the project reaffirms musical links between cultures as far afield as Hawaii, Madagascar, Aotearoa (New Zealand), Borneo, Solomon Islands, Tahiti, Guam and Rapa Nui (Easter Island). With over 100 musicians taking part, the resulting 18-track album fuses their individual performances into a smorgasbord of overlapping styles, accentuating both the similarities and regional differences of traditional instruments, voices, language and rhythm. With gorgeous videos available on the project's website, a full DVD on the near horizon and a touring ensemble gearing up for festivals, *Small Island Big Song* is really only just beginning. **Seth Jordan**

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REISSUES & ARCHIVE

Our monthly guide to the most exciting catalogue releases, historic issues and box-sets

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Bach is Best ... on 222 discs

Jonathan Freeman-Attwood reviews one of the most ambitious box-set projects ever

Breeze blocks of discs marking anniversaries tend to sit somewhere between the opportunistic and the intermittently illuminating. **'Bach 333'**, marking 333 years since Johann Sebastian Bach's birth, is an incomparably lavish and celebratory conceit not yet seen on this scale. Far from a single record company padding out its rich catalogue to celebrate a major figure – Philips for Mozart in 1991 and Hänssler for Bach in 2000 (remember the disc dedicated to Bach's Scales from Weimar?) – the ambition here is to collect as much of the best of Bach recorded music as possible from the last 90-odd years: a mash-up of traditional big-scale completism, in this case 222 CDs from the Universal Catalogue (essentially DG, Decca and Philips), creatively and pragmatically padded out by interpretations from 32 'guest' labels so that all Bach's works appear in 'period-style' performances, alongside supplementary 'historical recordings' (more on that distinction below!) and the most beautifully produced, informative and rigorously presented written material.

This unique labour of love has been expertly helmed from the bridge by Senior Vice-President of Universal Classics, Paul Moseley, supported by Nicholas Kenyon's experienced consultancy where he also offers a richly informative volume, providing illuminating commentary on every work. It also contains Dorothea Schröder's

compassionate biography, 13 fascinating new essays by eminent Bach scholars (including an intriguing one on the abandoned contest between Bach and Marchand), an introduction and DVD film by the ubiquitous John Eliot Gardiner, President of the key collaborating organisation, the Leipzig Bach Archive. The whole seems unerringly exhaustive. I tried to imagine what else I'd have included. Ah, yes, an essay on the lost and missing works? Not to worry: that doyen of Bach scholars, Christoph Wolff, covers it in all its tantalising brutality. There's even a taster of the new BWV catalogue as it's being updated to reflect extensive new research (chronology, the different versions of works and reviewed authenticity) for final publication in 2019-20.

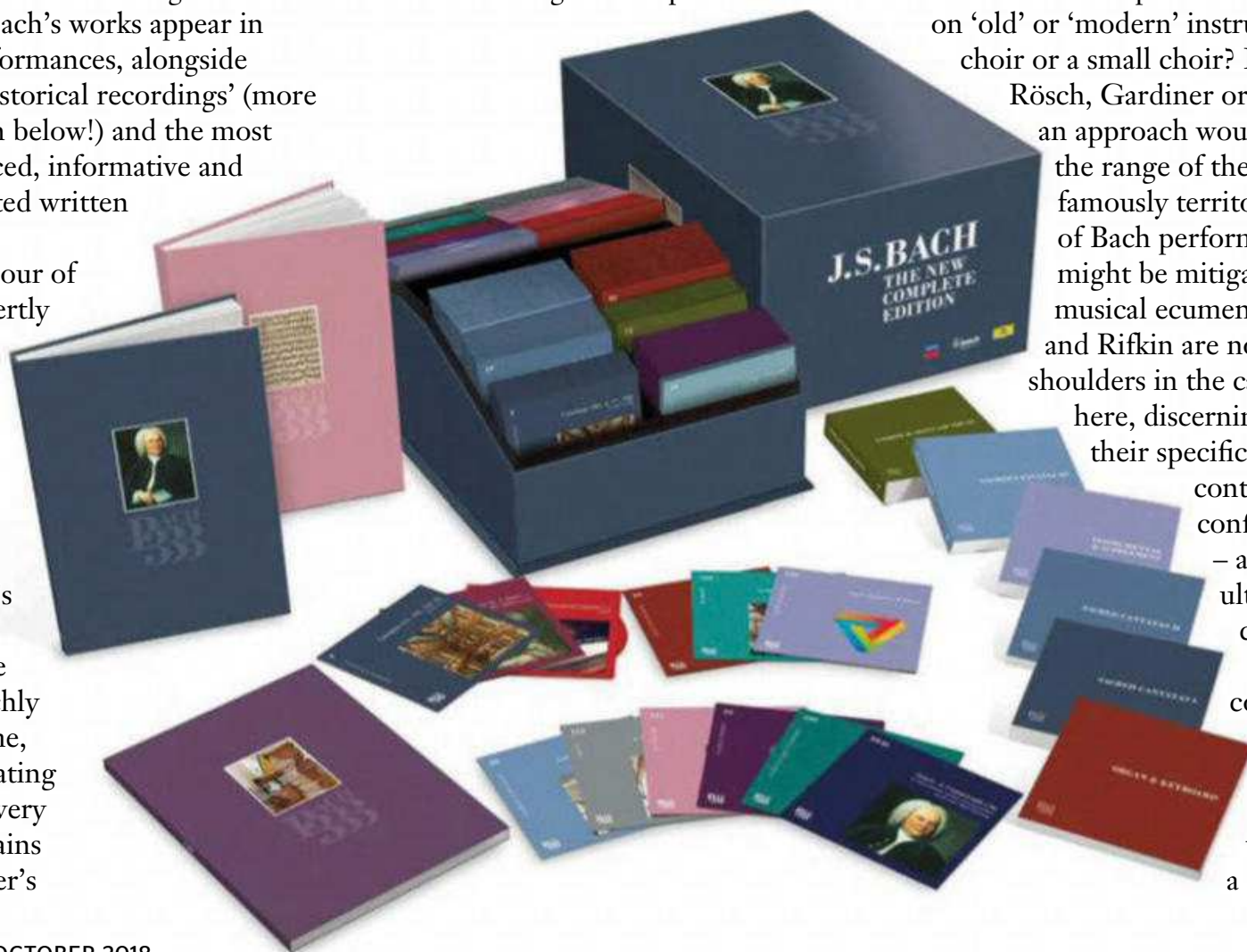
But, above all, 'Bach 333' is a treasure trove of Bach's global impact in the

form of a recorded legacy. Reflecting the most eclectic and often multifarious interpretative lineages, the 'sounds of each age' are positioned within their various instrumental and vocal narratives. The principle currency of the enterprise is rooted in 'historically informed' performance, with the category of 'traditions' presented in the form of an appendix or even curiosity ('alternative' recordings as they are termed). There is a taut coherence in this approach even if it encourages a somewhat polarising view of Bach performance and discography.

Perhaps the alternative method might have been too dangerous? To deliver a necessarily subjective view on the 'high-water marks' of performance for each work. For example, what constitutes the most searching and expressive vocabulary used in BWV1 – irrespective of its execution on 'old' or 'modern' instruments, a big choir or a small choir? Lehmann,

Rösch, Gardiner or Suzuki? Such an approach would surely inhibit the range of the project but the famously territorial position of Bach performance criticism might be mitigated in a spirit of musical ecumenism. If Richter and Rifkin are not exactly rubbing shoulders in the cantata section here, discerning examples of their specifically valuable contributions are confidently presented – and that is ultimately what counts.

In the four compartments of vocal, keyboard, orchestral and instrumental, we're offered a plethora of





St Thomas's Church and School in Leipzig, Bach's focus of activities from 1723 until his death in 1750. Copperplate engraving by Johann Gottfried Krügener, 1723

household-name recordings (no Gould *Goldbergs*, alas!) with the lion's share, as you would expect, from DG's Archiv label, or certainly Universal-centric. Occasionally pragmatism on that score governs choice and prevents arguably more distinguished readings from being highlighted. For all my admiration for Kenneth Gilbert, is his *Well-Tempered Clavier* really the most representative performance on the harpsichord of such an iconic work, even if we have Pollini and Schiff as 'alternatives'? The cantatas are dominated by John Eliot Gardiner's 'Soli Deo Gloria' (SDG) performances from his Millennial Pilgrimage – Universal effectively buying back the catalogue from which DG originally pulled the plug, thereby necessitating SDG's existence. It is peppered discerningly with additional artists, mainly fellow cantata heavy-weights Koopman and Suzuki. My heart leapt to see Christophe Coin's tiny but revelatory readings, such as his delectable BWV115, while I am a touch disappointed not to see more Fritz Werner and none of Felix Prohaska's blissful recordings from the early 1950s, the revelatory 'scenas' of BWVs70 and 78 especially. And as we're about it, those heart-warming Archiv versions of the obbligate violin sonatas

with Eduard Melkus and Huguette Melkus appear to have slipped under the radar. But, happily, not much else has.

As the richest treasure trove ever dedicated to a single composer, the weighing of the grand design with personal preference inevitably becomes a fairly futile exercise. The possibilities for discovery seem almost endless in the unquenchable desire to cover as many angles of Bach as possible: 'Bach after

In sum, this vastly impressive creation is shamelessly idealistic

Bach', 'Bach and Other Composers' and 'Bach Interactive'. Relish the Kurtágs playing the Sinfonia of BWV106 in a widely representative selection of piano transcriptions (though the absence of that doyen Samuil Feinberg playing his own arrangement of the Prelude and Fugue in E minor, 'The Wedge' is a notable loss), the various pots of re-orchestrated gold from Stokowski and others (though sadly no Henry Wood), jazz, and some riveting cross-over paraphrases, 'New Colours of Bach', many specially recorded. Indeed, new recording is another corollary of the

project – around 10 hours of it – including highly impressive but somewhat over-calculated readings of the unaccompanied violin music by Giuliano Carmignola.

In sum, this vastly impressive creation is shamelessly idealistic. Its primary strength lies not just in the quality of the editorial direction and consummate values but how so many small independent labels have responded generously to the spirit of the exercise and pushed commercial sensitivities aside. Inevitably, some labels will have felt that their own Bach catalogue would have been placed at risk, if they had contributed. The organ category is arguably the greatest loser in this respect.

Who's this for? Bach aficionados will have much of the music already and at around £400 this presents a dilemma for them. But, ultimately, this is not an object to be 'compared with' or geometrically assessed. It is the biggest imaginable bang of Bachiana. It sucks you in and makes you realise that you want to be one of the 8500 lucky owners of a spectacular limited edition. **G** See also our *Bach* cover feature on page 14

THE RECORDING

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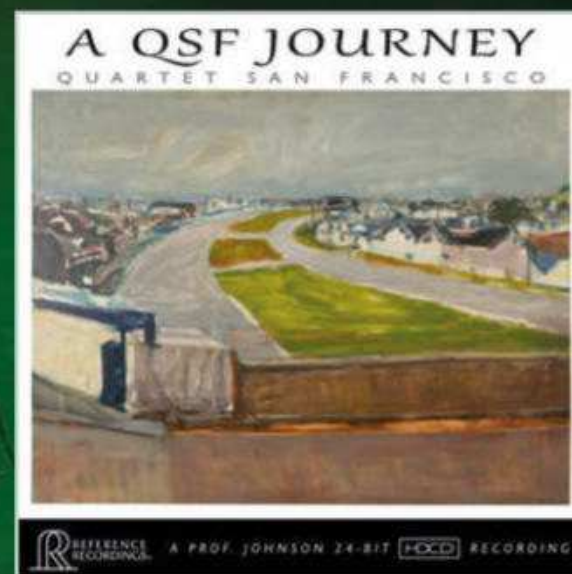
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Emanuel Ax: The Complete RCA legacy

Patrick Rucker has been enjoying a feast of recordings from the start of Ax's career

The American pianist Emanuel Ax was born in Lvov, Ukraine to Polish Holocaust survivors. His family moved first to Warsaw, then to Winnipeg, before settling finally in New York. Now 69, Ax maintains a robust concert schedule and teaches at The Juilliard School, where he was once the pupil of Mieczysław Munz. A year after his victory at the 1974 Arthur Rubinstein Competition, he began recording for RCA. This new collection is the first complete reissue of the 23 recordings Ax made over the next dozen years. With such an abundance of music, this review can at best point to highlights.

Speaking of his 11-year tutelage under Munz, himself a Busoni pupil, Ax has said that his teacher would frequently suggest unusual repertory, the Weber *Invitation to the Dance*, for instance, not the original, but in Tausig's transcription, or Liszt's transcriptions of Schubert songs which, in the 1960s, were anything but fashionable.

Ax brought this affinity for the unfamiliar with him when he made his first recording in February of 1975. In addition to Chopin's B minor Sonata, there is a riveting Liszt group. Four Schubert song transcriptions are pianistically stunning. Yet even more striking is Ax's flawless declamation of the texts, their prosody eloquent and inerrant, surely rooted in the same feeling for language that earned him a degree in French from Columbia. The songs are rounded out by two Etudes. 'Gnomenreigen' achieves elfin delicacy in an extraordinary display of *pianissimo leggiero*, leavened with wry humour. The Sixth Paganini Etude transcends its formal theme and variations in a bravura succession of affects of heroic sweep and grandeur, amounting to a Romantic mini epic.

Two years and three recordings later, in 1977 Ax indulged his proclivity for the French in a Ravel album that includes a lovely *Ma mère l'Oye* with his wife Yoko Nazaki. The album's centerpiece, however, is the *Valses nobles et sentimentales*. This reading may not inspire you to dance around the room, but it will likely have you hanging on every note. Ravel's harmonic genius, his unique textures and colours and, yes, his polyphony are presented in gorgeous array.

Ax's first concerto recording in 1978 was a collaboration with Eugene Ormandy and the Philadelphia Orchestra in Chopin's F minor Concerto (No 2). Ormandy was of



Emanuel Ax, the early years: proof that his remarkable artistry blossomed early

course much sought after as a concerto partner of great skill and pliancy, willing and able to follow his soloists into whatever interpretative terrain they chose. The conductor had his work cut out for him in a performance in which Ax indulges in some extravagant and not always convincing rubato, as well as some occasionally startling interpretive choices. Fast forward to 1983 and a much more successful collaboration of great distinction and originality. By this time, Ax had recorded pairs of Mozart concertos with Eduardo Mata and the Dallas SO and with Pinchas Zukerman and the St Paul CO. He also had Chopin's E minor Chopin Concerto, again with Ormandy and Philadelphia, under his belt. Brahms's D minor Concerto with the Chicago SO under James Levine, on the other hand, is in a class by itself. This true meeting of soloist's and conductor's minds yields a performance as rich as it is commanding. The development of the opening *Maestoso* has an irresistible lilt and schwung that stands in piquant contrast to the prevalent tragedy. In an exceptionally broad *Adagio*, Ax sculpts phrases that rise and fall with a pathos that speaks in a hushed pianissimo of nearly inconsolable grief. The chains of trills which prepare the movement's denouement are transformative, evoking in their own personal way Artur Schnabel's magical concept of this transcendent moment. An intrepid, determined Rondo

sets an heroic seal on the entire concerto, concluding on a note as close to redemption as Brahms will allow.

Among the other concerto recordings, the Beethoven cycle with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra under André Previn, including a *Choral Fantasy* in the company of the New York PO and NY Choral Artists under Zubin Mehta, must be mentioned. Recorded between 1983 and 1986, these intelligent and stylish readings have held up well.

Finally, among several fine chamber music recordings, including collaborations with the Cleveland and Guarneri Quartets, three are standouts. Ax recorded Schubert's *Winterreise* and *Die schöne Müllerin* with the Swedish baritone Håkan Hagegård in readings both thoughtful and perceptive. And his long standing partnership with cellist Yo-Yo Ma is celebrated in a splendid disc devoted to the two Brahms sonatas.

Today there are well over 100 recordings of Ax available, covering a wide range of repertory, including his commitment to contemporary music not featured in this collection. Yet these first 23 RCA recordings endearingly exhibit the first flowering of Ax's artistry, even as they demonstrate his precocious mastery. **G**

THE RECORDING

Emanuel Ax: The Complete RCA Album Collection

RCA Red Seal ® (23 discs) 8898 548519-2

Watch the windows – sonic boom!

Peter Quantrill reviews some recent LPs ranging from the 1812 to intimate Nordic folk

With Telarc's **Tchaikovsky 1812** we may have reached peak geek. The first of these LP round-ups (A/16) referred to early digital recordings (first on LP, then CD) from the Cleveland-based company that threatened (or promised) to break your equipment through the sheer force of their fidelity. It was a marketing claim so sensational yet so astutely targeted at the high-end hi-fi market that it worked, selling more than 800,000 copies of a single recording. This one made Telarc's name at much the same time, just as – with what now looks like a very English restraint by comparison – 'A Feather on the Breath of God' made Hyperion's.

In this particular case there was truth behind the hype. Internet forum threads still breathlessly discuss which particular combinations of cartridge, tonearm, player, amps and speakers can and cannot cope with the artillery recorded by the Telarc engineers at an Ohio university campus (where it proceeded to blow out the windows of a building several hundred feet away) and then balanced in to the final mix at an unusually high level. For readers with time on their hands, there is no shortage of YouTube videos showing needles that ride or flinch and skip the final cannon blast.

At a list price just shy of £30 this faithfully reproduced, 180-gram new reissue

of the original LP may appear steep. In fact *Gramophone* adverts from 1979 reveal Telarc LPs retailing for £8.80; adjusted for inflation in today's money that's around £42, which is still a bargain compared to 'ultra-high-quality recording', 200-gram pressings available online from specialist dealers for \$200 and more. Having tried out the reissue on three different sets of

There is no shortage of YouTube videos showing needles that ride or flinch and skip the final cannon blast

equipment, all in the budget- to mid-price range, I am almost disappointed to report that none of them failed 'the 1812 test'. The grooves towards the centre of the pressing still resemble a rock-strewn path up Scafell even to the naked eye, and Telarc claims that the latest mastering was made with the same cutting lathe as the very first, but at what level isn't specified; there were three successive pressings issued in the early 1980s to cope with demand, each cut at a different level of (un)playability.

Complete with yellow sticker and pink insert – 'On the first playing, proceed with caution until a safe playback level can be determined!' in italic capitals for good measure – the issue is a piece of gramophone history. Its strictly musical qualities are more open to question. Kunzel makes some blocky tempo changes in both the Overture and the *Capriccio italiano* on side 2. Though the front desks of the Cincinnati strings stand up to scrutiny in the 1812's opening hymnody, tuning in *tutti* is often raw, tending towards sharp, especially from winds and brass.

It's a far cry from the unfailingly sleek and

graceful playing of the Boston Symphony's concertmaster, Joseph Silverstein, on another early digital Telarc LP of **Vivaldi's** *The Four Seasons*. Seiji Ozawa's direction has unabashed retro appeal, never so glutinous as the EMI record of his mentor Herbert von Karajan with Anne-Sophie Mutter from the same era, and the Telarc team captures bite as well as bloom in the Boston Symphony's accompaniment.

A third Telarc reissue spreads **Orff's** *Carmina Burana* over three sides – extravagantly so even in 1981, as Edward Greenfield noted in his original review (9/81) – and the consequent increase in dynamic range offers only partial comparison for Robert Shaw's foursquare direction.

Half-cut Beethoven

As it happens, EG was a member of the 'Sounds in Retrospect' panel in March 1980 when both the Telarc 1812 and a new **Beethoven** symphony cycle from Vienna were put under the audio microscope. This has been reissued by DG in luxurious fashion (at a price just shy of £150) as part of the label's contributions to the Leonard Bernstein centenary. Padded out by the *Prometheus* and *King Stephen* overtures, the box now runs to nine instead of eight LPs, which are rather superfluously enclosed within the original outer sleeves for the separate issues of each symphony.

'Dry, compressed and opaque' was the panel's reaction to the engineering of the *Eroica*. Spread over three LP sides, and enhanced by the same half-speed mastering technology used by Telarc for its original 1812 pressings, the newly remastered sound is lucid and full of life (not least Bernstein's grunting exhortations in the finale of the Seventh), set clearly within the Musikverein acoustic. The residual dryness belongs both to DG's house style and to the particular, New York-accented variety of Viennese sound cultivated by Bernstein.

Why should half-speed mastering make a difference? In the LP manufacturing process, cutting lathes create a lacquer template which is to be used as the 'stamper' for commercial pressings. The slower the machine operates, the more accurate it should be. A pitch component originally recorded at 10kHz can be mastered at 5kHz – that's still 5000 vibrations a second being cut into the lacquer – so that high-range frequency

Telarc's vinyl reissue of their famed 1812 recording, complete with the original warning



information becomes much easier to manage and to reproduce. The difference is most audible in the finale of the Ninth. Without recourse to splitting it over two sides – unlike the recent BPO/Rattle cycle on LP (11/17) – the remastering engineers have noticeably opened out the wind band and more distantly balanced chorus. Some compression at side-ends is still evident, especially in odd-numbered finales, and the very success of the remastering shows up Bernstein's unwillingness to divide his violins.

Artfully yellowed facsimiles of the original recording reports ('Aufnahmeprotokollen') enhance the set's retro appeal, but the music-making itself is 'historic' in the best sense of the word. Why does it reward intent and repeated listening? It's something to do with the voice-leading. Tension and relaxation arise organically because every part, every motif, responds to the others. Nothing is repeated, nothing is mechanical. The *Larghetto* of No 2 and the *Andante* of No 5 are prone to hang fire whatever the chosen tempo, Beethoven's metronome mark included. Bernstein unfolds them broadly and with an inner logic that justifies and even requires lengthy fermatas between sections such as the transitions from Trio back to Scherzo in the Fourth and Seventh. Elsewhere the pulse is often swift and the momentum inexorable, as in a fiery First and an enraptured account of the *Pastoral*.

Old friends and last leaves

Not everything improves with back-transfer to LP. As the soloist on an often frenetic and disjointed 2000 Warner Classics recording of **Rachmaninov's** Second Piano Concerto, Hélène Grimaud is still placed absurdly to the fore, which does no favours to her diamond-tipped articulation and shallow tone at *forte* and above. The Philharmonia is largely confined to a wishy-washy backing act except in some disconcerting moments of spot-miking for flute here, pizzicato bass there. A-B comparison with the CD confirms that the flat clarinet solo in the *Adagio sostenuto* is not an LP pressing issue. Indeed, all the recent Warner Classics reissues are blessed with beautifully silent surfaces.

Not least in **Tchaikovsky**, with the LSO *Sleeping Beauty* masterminded by André Previn with unobtrusive dabs of greasepaint and recorded at Abbey Road by EMI's old firm of Christopher Bishop and Christopher Parker: slightly tubby-sounding from a modern perspective,



The Danish Quartet mine a particularly sober and nostalgic tone on their album 'Last Leaf'

certainly when compared to the brilliant definition achieved by Telarc's engineers in Watford Town Hall for an LSO *Nutcracker* (the company's first modern LP reissue, 6/17). Three LPs are tightly squeezed into a standard gatefold.

The kind of arm's length, concert-hall clarity that is a hallmark of the EMI Abbey Road sound is more effectively demonstrated by the 1959 Igor Markevitch **Stravinsky** *Rite of Spring*. Distantly recorded solo wind and some ruthless tempos (such as the 'Danse sacrée', a bit of a scramble) don't greatly diminish the impact of the Philharmonia at full tilt, pushed further to extremes of volume and attack than in their mono version of 1953.

The pick of these Warner reissues is a 1996 album of **Schubert** Impromptus played by Elisabeth Leonskaja with the quality of powerful concentration that she brings to her recitals. Reverse-engineering the Berlin Teldex studio recording for LP has only deepened the shades of burgundy which she draws from the lower octaves. Yet in her hands deliberate never means lugubrious; her right-hand figurations eddy and cascade rather than glitter even at close quarters. Each variation of the *Schöne Müllerin*-style melody in the long B flat Impromptu, D935 No 3, brings a fresh perspective within a reassuringly steady pulse.

In the wake of 'Wood Works' (Dacapo, A/16) comes a sequel of Nordic folk tunes from the Danish Quartet, who have moved to ECM in the meanwhile. The concept of **Last Leaf** grows from

a Christmas hymn, but don't expect chocolate-log carols or chestnut-roasting comfort: this is from Denmark, remember. The quartet's members have done their own arranging, and they segue without a break between dances and songs without words on a polished 48-minute concept album that's identical in CD and LP incarnations. The predominantly sober or nostalgic tone is lifted early on by an infectious Polska and later by a whispered pizzicato version of 'How were you so sick last night?'. Again, maybe it's a Danish thing. **G**

THE RECORDINGS

Tchaikovsky 1812 Overture, etc

Cincinnati SO / Kunzel

Telarc (F) ● TEL00009

Vivaldi The Four Seasons

Silverstein; Boston SO / Ozawa

Telarc (F) ● TEL00004

Orff Carmina Burana, etc Atlanta SO / Shaw

Telarc (F) ● TEL00006

Beethoven Symphonies VPO / Bernstein

DG (F) ● 479 8721

Rachmaninov Piano Concerto No 2, etc

Grimaud; Philh Orch / Ashkenazy

Warner Classics (F) ● 9029 69154-1

Tchaikovsky Sleeping Beauty LSO / Previn

Warner Classics (F) ● 9029 56684-8

Stravinsky The Rite of Spring

Philh Orch / Markevitch

Warner Classics (F) ● 9029 69153-9

Schubert Impromptus Leonskaja

Warner Classics (F) ● 9029 56682-8

'Last Leaf' Danish Quartet

ECM New Series (F) ● 481 6497

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BOX-SET *Round-up*

Rob Cowan offers a personal round-up of chamber, choral and operatic gems

Surveying the stakes of intelligent and insightful **Beethoven** string quartet cycles by gifted young players finds us with a plethora of recommendable choices, sets either completed or in the making by the likes of the Artemis, Casals, Elias, Belcea and Alcan Quartets and the immensely personable Quartetto di Cremona, whose consistently alert interpretations also enjoy the benefit of remarkably lifelike SACD sound. This or that significant textual detail might hold sway for some collectors whereas, in terms of interpretation, the Quartetto di Cremona parade a keen edge, with generally swift pacing, tension within rests and a wide range of instrumental colours. The opening *Allegro* of Op 18 No 5 has a bright, chirpy feel to it, whereas the parallel movement in No 6 really is a bustling *con brio*, which means that the music's implied conversational *opera buffa* element takes a back seat. Op 95 opens to an *Allegro* that's all but maniacal in its urgency, whereas Op 135's Scherzo bounces along, a breezy preparation for an expressive but mobile account of the *Lento* slow movement. I was fascinated by the Cremona's unusual voicing of Op 130's *Alla danza tedesca* but a little disappointed that the Cavatina is tailed by the *allegro*-finale 'rewrite' rather than by the gnarled *Grosse Fuge* (which, incidentally, is magnificently played: you can find it on disc 3). Still, this is without question a set to reckon with. Even with the Takács Quartet (Decca) as overall leaders in the digital field I'd strongly recommend it, especially given the comparatively unfamiliar String Quintet (with the Emerson's Lawrence Dutton as the extra viola player) as a welcome bonus, another engaging performance.

A very useful collection of **Mendelssohn** choral works arrives from Hänssler Classic featuring the ever-dependable forces of Helmuth Rilling and his Bach-Collegium Stuttgart and Gächinger Kantorei, recorded between 1994 and 2003. Rilling's signature warmth is apparent right from opening of *Elijah* (in German, so *Elias* here), and even more so in 'Herr Gott Abrahams', candidly prayerful as sung by Wolfgang Schöne. Mendelssohn could as well have written 'Höre, Israel ...' with Christine Schäfer's silvery soprano in mind and that wonderful chorus 'Fürchte dich nicht' is vigorously sung. The



Paulus recording features Juliane Banse, Michael Schade and the Prague Chamber Choir. What I most enjoy about Rilling's Mendelssohn is its acknowledgement, in performance terms, of the music's mixed lineage, significantly Bachian on the one hand, as well as Classical and upliftingly pre-Romantic (the first chorus of *Paulus*, for example). Who could resist *Singet dem Herrn ein neues Lied* (Psalm 91) as sung here?

Mention of Bachian influences brings me to **Wilhelm Friedemann Bach**, Johann Sebastian's second child and eldest son by Maria Barbara, who, despite his accomplishments as an organist, improviser and composer, never achieved a stable income and died in poverty. Friedemann incorporated more elements of the contrapuntal style learnt from his father than any of his three composer brothers but his individualistic and improvisatory edge endeared his work to musicians of the late 19th century. Brilliant Classics has done WFB proud with a 14-CD Edition, the highlight of which is surely the first disc, a programme of orchestral works stylishly played by the CPE Bach Chamber Orchestra under Hartmut Haenchen. There are two discs of harpsichord concertos featuring Claudio Astronio, flute sonatas (Wilbert Hazelzet and Marion Moonen), keyboard works (Astronio again, including two discs' worth of organ music played by Filippo Turri) and a pair of discs devoted to cantatas with Hermann Max conducting (soloists include Barbara Schlick and Wilfried Jochens). Schlick is especially memorable in the aria 'Vater, mir Erbarmen' from the cantata F80.

A further Bach connection is famously forged with **Gounod**, whose 200th birthday we've recently celebrated and whose *Ave Maria*, based on the first Prelude from JSB's '48', has to rank among the most famous of all art songs. Barbara Hendricks does the honours for Gounod's 'greatest hit' in Warner Classics' handsome, musically enticing 15-CD Gounod Edition, whereas other *mélodies* fall to the likes of Camille Maurane, Gérard Souzay, Felicity Lott, Ann Murray, José Carreras, Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, José van Dam, Marilyn Horne and Pierre Bernac. For most collectors, however, the larger-scale works will prove the principal draw, *Faust* being presented in Georges Prêtre's superb Paris Opéra recording with Plácido Domingo in his prime, as well as Mirella Freni as Marguerite, Nicolai Ghiaurov as Mephistophélès and Thomas Allen as Valentin.

Interesting that when the opera first appeared in German opera houses the presence of a rival work of the same name by Spohr meant that some theatres decided to opt for *Margarethe* rather than *Faust* as a title, and Warners provide a disc of highlights from that too (in German), with an all-star cast of Nicolai Gedda, Edda Moser, Fischer-Dieskau and Kurt Moll. Michel Plasson offers us both *Roméo et Juliette* (with Alfredo Kraus and Catherine Malfitano, and van Dam as Friar Laurence) and *Mireille* (Freni, Alain Vanzo, van Dam, etc). Also from Plasson, *Mors et vita* and the two symphonies, whereas the *Messe chorale* falls to Michel Corboz, the *Messe solennelle de Sainte-Cécile* to Jean-Claude Hartemann and the Little Symphony for wind instruments to Sir John Barbirolli and members of the Hallé Orchestra. In short, an international-style celebration of a major bicentennial master, with some great singing and authoritative conducting. **G**

THE RECORDINGS

Beethoven Quartetto di Cremona
Audite **M** ⑧ AUDITE21 454

Mendelssohn Rilling
Hänssler Classic **M** ⑥ HC17082

WF Bach Haenchen, Max, Astronio et al
Brilliant Classics **S** ⑭ 95596

The Gounod Edition
Warner Classics **M** ⑮
9029 56488-7

REPLAY

Rob Cowan's monthly survey of historic reissues and archive recordings



A remarkable Rachmaninov discovery

There have already been at least a couple of notable first-time historic releases this year (Alexander Borovsky's '48' and various Hans Rosbaud broadcasts) but when it comes to bending a learning curve just about as far as it will go, this set tops the lot. You need only play the opening few bars of Eugene Ormandy's grieving 1943 broadcast account of Rachmaninov's *Isle of the Dead* to sense that a tragic event is being commemorated. That event was Rachmaninov's own death five days earlier and in marking it Ormandy gave what is possibly his most deeply felt Rachmaninov performance on disc.

Overwhelming isn't the word. But, fine as *The Isle* is (in spite of some authorised cuts), the principal draw in this game-changing collection is Rachmaninov's own piano demonstration of significant sections of his as-then fresh-minted *Symphonic Dances*, recorded (maybe surreptitiously) on December 20, 1940, probably at Eugene Ormandy's house. Ormandy and his Philadelphia Orchestra are the work's dedicatees and the event as recorded is an object lesson in how the music should be moulded and shaped, its huge dynamic range, and the singular manner of its very Russian-sounding rhetoric. The acetate-based recording quality is a good deal better than one might have expected (Ward Marston has worked miracles on the sound restoration), while well over half the work is represented.

Any potential doubts regarding the recording's provenance instantly vanish in the light of the evidence. The composer's playing style is unmistakable, its sense of romantic freedom, thunderous attack, crispness of articulation, delicacy and almost unendurable tenderness, especially in the haunting reference to the First Symphony near the close of the First Dance (on disc 1, track 3). What we hear is sometimes at variance with what we see in the latest published score (Boosey & Hawkes), the crotchets at the very beginning of the first dance, for example, marked *pp* for violins and violas but where Rachmaninov, in this prototype piano

version, builds a crescendo some bars before the marked *poco crescendo* (bar 5), by which time he's reducing his tone again. The second segment (bars 48 to 236) is more a rough-hewn charcoal sketch, definitely the pianist turned conductor this time, incorporating as it does the lovely second theme where the composer's playing resembles his familiar renditions of his more lyrical piano Preludes, the melody's top line underlined with vocal intensity: you could almost imagine his friend Chaliapin singing it. Rachmaninov's own 'singing along' is clearly audible, as are various rhythmic vocal interjections, most dramatically the *ff* timpani semiquaver figure that first appears at bar 9. There's the Second Dance's haunting waltz melody, so wistfully played and yet with an abundance of rich tone in the lower registers and no lack of brilliance, Rachmaninov rushing impetuously across the keys much as he does on so many of his commercial recordings, or the excerpt from the Third Dance, more melancholy, even darkly pensive in spirit, than any other I've heard.

As I say, checking what you hear against the score – rehearsal figures are given in the booklet – allows you to reference the composer's approach against the countless commercial recordings of the full, finished publication that have appeared since, including Ormandy's. Incidentally, the piano excerpts are included twice, once in unedited form and once in an edited version where most of the repeated phrases and spoken comments have been removed, and with the music in the right order. All three dances are represented.

We're told (in Richard Taruskin's superb note) that Ormandy didn't especially like the work and that Rachmaninov didn't take to the way he performed it. Dimitri Mitropoulos was evidently a better bet: he'd performed it in Minneapolis at a concert where Rachmaninov was also playing and the composer asked him to re-programme the *Symphonic Dances* in New York so that he could hear his performance at home on the radio. That performance is

part of the set, Mitropoulos's mesmerising way with the piece combining rhythmic assertiveness with lyrical ardour, the taut Third Dance consistently courting danger, at times sounding as if the entire orchestra is risking life and limb.

Mitropoulos also offers us an impassioned performance of the Third Symphony from 1941, again with the Philharmonic-Symphony, quite different to the composer's own recording with the Philadelphia Orchestra, certainly in the way the first movement's principal theme is phrased. Punchy, occasionally headstrong and with a palpable sense of yearning, it's another winner. And there's more: Leopold Stokowski conducting the American Symphony Orchestra and Schola Cantorum in the *Three Russian Songs* for chorus and orchestra (1966) and a vastly superior transfer of the last of the songs, known as 'Powder and Paint', a saucy little number, earthily, even sexily performed by Nadezhda Plevitskaya with Rachmaninov at the piano (1926, also out on RCA).

Benno Moiseiwitsch is all heart and nimble fingers in the *Paganini Rhapsody* (under Adrian Boult in 1946), a wonderful performance virtually the equal of the composer's own, and there are primitive-sounding recordings of Rachmaninov playing his *Polka italiana*, a Russian folk song and fragments of Ballades by Liszt and Brahms, recorded in recital. What we have of the Liszt is especially impressive.

These tracks are interesting to have as a supplement to the main deal, which is for my money the year's top-ranking CD release, and blow whether it's old or new. Henceforth it will alter the way you listen to some great music, and that surely is what profound listening is all about.

THE RECORDING



**'Rachmaninoff Plays
Symphonic Dances'**

Marston © 3 53022-2

Available from

marstonrecords.com



Rachmaninov: a newly discovered recording made by the composer in 1940 is released by Marston Records

Nikolayeva's Bach

Tatiana Nikolayeva was truly a noble spirit even among the great pianists of her era, her playing considered, uplifting and in her prime technically accomplished. Scribendum's 37-disc set has its ups and downs, most of the 'downs' located in a flawed live Beethoven sonata cycle from the mid-1980s. Here Nikolayeva's frequent falls from technical grace recall the 'artistry-at-a-price' recordings of Cortot and Schnabel. And yet listen to her *Hammerklavier*, with its unusually expansive first movement and confessional *Adagio sostenuto*, and you realise that that price really is worth paying. Musically, it's a cycle to cherish; but when it comes to the earlier *Diabelli* Variations there is no such price-tag, just consistently inspired playing, the sort that distinguishes her famous account of Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier*, where the mood alternates between cleanly clipped exuberance and deep thoughtfulness. Nikolayeva 'nails' each piece with the secure touch of a Gould, a Fischer, a Schiff, a Feinberg or a Landowska, spinning the laudable illusion that you're hearing perfection for the duration (there are also recordings of selected '48' Preludes and Fugues from the 1950s).

The *Goldberg Variations* are hardly less distinctive and those wonderful 20th-century Bach outgrowths, the Preludes and Fugues by Shostakovich, are represented by recordings from 1962 and 1987, the former being the firmer in outline. There's music by her teacher at the Moscow Conservatory, Evgeny Golubev, concertos by Mozart for one, two and three pianos, Tchaikovsky's First and Second Concertos as well as the *Concert Fantasy*, and works by

Prokofiev (Sonata No 8), Chopin, Schumann, Liadov, Medtner, Mendelssohn, Rachmaninov, Bartók, Borodin and Nikolayeva herself. Those interested in studying the evolving artistry of this great player should invest without delay, whereas the as-yet-uninitiated are in for a real treat.

THE RECORDING



The Art of Tatiana Nikolayeva

Scribendum © (37 discs)
SC810

Keilberth revisited

In last month's Replay I covered 'Joseph Keilberth: The Telefunken Recordings 1953-63', concluding my appraisal with the claim that 'much of what's gathered here proves Keilberth to have been an interesting interpreter with many persuasive ideas'. Now along comes a second, smaller set from Profil that duplicates some of the material but adds a fair amount that's new. Of particular note is a quite overwhelming live 1960 account of Bruckner's Ninth Symphony with the Berlin Philharmonic, broader than its 1956 Hamburg State Philharmonic predecessor and significantly more intense. Memorable wartime recordings by the Bamberg Symphony's predecessor, the German Philharmonic Orchestra Prague, include Reger's *Böcklin Tone Poems*, Wolf's *Italian Serenade* and the First and Third Act Preludes from Hans Pfitzner's *Palestrina*, and there are live post-war performances of Pfitzner's Piano Concerto (Rosl Schmid), Schumann's Piano Concerto (a very dramatic and assertive Annie Fischer) and

the Fourth Symphony. Bruch's First Violin Concerto with Georg Kulenkampff (Berlin, 1941) is among the best from the period and there are various opera preludes, some taken from Wagner performances recorded live at Bayreuth. Altogether, another worthwhile collection.

THE RECORDING



Joseph Keilberth

Bruckner, Reger, Pfitzner, etc
Profil © ⑩ PH18019

Julian Olevsky

Among the many gifted instrumentalists who, over the years, have sidestepped the limelight is the American violinist Julian Olevsky, whose Westminster recordings enjoyed temporary circulation within the UK many moons ago. Olevsky's sound subscribes to the same expressive template – vibrant, emotionally charged and tonally warm – that we already know from Louis Kaufman, David Nadien, Eudice Shapiro and Isaac Stern, reaching outwards to Heifetz, Elman and Kreisler, though Olevsky's virtuosity is anything but 'in your face'. An LP coupling of Wieniawski's Second Concerto (with its orchestral *tutti* intact) and Lalo's *Symphonie espagnole* found the Lalo missing its moody 'Intermezzo' third movement. For this excellent Doremi reissue, however, Jacob Harnoy has located that very movement for a first release, albeit in mono (the rest of the recording is in stereo). The performance presents Olevsky at his very best, as does the Wieniawski and Bruch First Concerto – playing that flies straight to the heart. Mendelssohn's Concerto is similarly affecting and so is a mono Brahms Concerto with Howard Mitchell conducting. This is the fifth volume of a series that has already yielded an exceptional set of Mozart 'complete works' for violin and piano (Vol 1), Bach solo violin works (Vol 2), Vivaldi's *Il cimento* under Hermann Scherchen (Vol 3) and deftly played genre pieces, mostly by Kreisler (Vol 4). If you've never heard Olevsky, start with Vol 5 and then give Vol 1 a try, followed by Vols 2, 4 and 3, in that order. No one who has an ear for fine vintage violin-playing is likely to be disappointed.

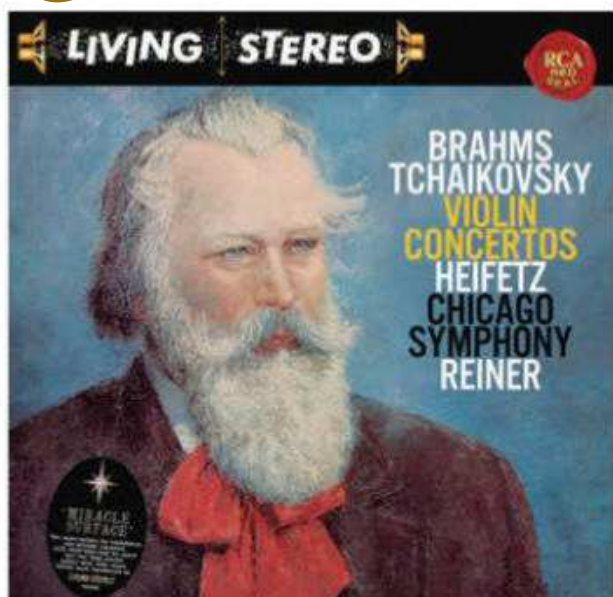
THE RECORDING



Legendary Treasures: Julian Olevsky, Vol 5

Doremi © ② DHR8054/5

Classics RECONSIDERED



Rob Cowan and Charlotte Gardner

take a trip down memory lane by returning to Heifetz's legendary 1955 recording of the Brahms Violin Concerto with Reiner in Chicago



Brahms

Violin Concerto in D

Jascha Heifetz *vs* Chicago SO / Fritz Reiner

RCA Red Seal

Heifetz's magnificent reading of the Brahms Violin Concerto has been put on disc most successfully. When the names of the other interpreters available read like a roll of drums, there is perhaps no call for a critic to put his finger on one version and call that the 'best'. But next time someone writes to me asking which set of the work to buy, I shall have little hesitation in answering: Heifetz. In the first movement he is lean, athletic, classical, scrupulous in his attention to the composer's demands and rhythmically very alert. That the actual fiddling is brilliant can be taken for granted. It is possible that you may want something warmer, something with a tug of heart-strings about it. Then Milstein's is probably

the version to make for. The DG disc with Oistrakh has received high praise in some quarters; I find little to enjoy in it beyond the actual physical excitement generated by the Russian violinist's playing – the strength and brilliance of his attack, and the tonal beauty of some of the chording. But the sense of style is ill-formed, the inflexions are quaint, the interpretation seems to me desperately undistinguished, and Konwitschny's contribution is ponderous, inert orchestral playing. Reiner and the Chicago Symphony do not contribute anything markedly positive to the new version, but provide thoroughly decent playing, here and there recorded rather too far below the soloist, but never letting one down.

The opening of the *Adagio*, that strangely scored passage which needs such careful tonal adjustment, is a straightforward prose

rather than poetry; but Reiner is careful not to let it sound like the slow movement of an oboe concerto. Heifetz is not exactly rapturous in his handling of this movement, but his playing has an ethereal quality not to be found in any of the rival versions. It is fine-drawn, fine-spun, aristocratic.

Heifetz carries all away in the finale, which is compound of flash and fire – fast, but not so fast as to make nonsense of Brahms's *ma non troppo vivace*, wonderfully alert and brilliant. He cannot help making Milstein sound stolid by comparison. Oistrakh has a distressing trick of flipping the fourth-beat accent of the third bar up into air like a gipsy-fiddler.

The Heifetz is not one of the best recordings; it is serviceable rather than brilliant. Readers should be able to find what they want either in the Heifetz, the Milstein or the Oistrakh. **Andrew Porter (3/56)**

Rob Cowan First, Charlotte, if it's OK with you, a little anecdote. Years ago, while covering the Manchester International Cello Festival, I interviewed the great cellist János Starker, who, when he learnt that I also wrote for *Gramophone*, quizzed me on our 'attitude' to American musicians. 'I could hardly believe a negative review of a Heifetz record,' he confessed. 'Then soon afterwards, Reiner and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra were the targets. Some time later, when the Heifetz-Reiner Brahms Concerto came out, I dared not even open the magazine! Well, had he read Andrew Porter's appreciative review he would surely have been delighted, though I'm not sure he would have gone along with the notion that 'Reiner and the Chicago Symphony do not contribute anything markedly positive to the new version'.

One point is worth noting, though, HMV's mono LP sounds very different from the stereo version that we enjoy nowadays – far drier and with Heifetz very much in your face. Of course, Heifetz being Heifetz, that was something of a privilege, but the twin-channel version is a good deal more natural than its mono equivalent.

Charlotte Gardner It certainly is! You're right, the mono is dry and often less natural-sounding; and then Heifetz enters smack in your ear. Still, I'm glad we have the two versions, and not simply for the academic interest of hearing exactly what Porter heard. As you say, having Heifetz in your face is something of a privilege, and I'm grateful for the experience the mono version gives us (which we can then apply to our listening of the stereo version) of Heifetz magnified – of the absolute liveness and

white heat of his playing. Also, you really hear that it's not all immaculate. I mean, the leaping succession of trills in bars 332 to 339 sounds quite rough! Yet that's actually all part of the fun of the ride, something to give us pause for thought when today's editing technology allows even demisemiquavers to be substituted in the pursuit of perfection.

RC Absolutely – but still, Heifetz devotee that I undoubtedly am, and even bearing Starker's remarks in mind, there's something about this particular recording that leaves me ill at ease. Heifetz himself is, of course, utterly magnificent: his fearless attack, spot-on intonation and sublime handling of the slow movement all floor me every time. And yet I prefer the cadenza (Heifetz's version of Auer's) on his earlier commercial recording under Koussevitzky to his own one as presented here. But where



Jascha Heifetz: 'his laser-like intensity is incomparable'

I really disagree with Porter is regarding David Oistrakh. Quaint inflexions? Desperately undistinguished interpretation? Konwitschny's contribution, ponderous and inertly played? What I draw from that majestic DG version is, first and foremost, Brahms. What I draw from Heifetz here is, primarily, Heifetz.

CG Ooh, you've given me too much to respond to in one chunk there! I'll begin, though, with your first point on cadenzas, because what I myself draw from Heifetz – in both recordings: the Koussevitzky and the Reiner – is simply that he should have just stuck to Joachim's. As regards the Reiner, I probably feel almost as uncomfortable about it as you do: it's very busy, to the point of being a bit manic. However, I'm even less of a fan of what he did with Koussevitzky, because this one sags and drifts off course. It's, in a word, indulgent. Say what you like about the Reiner one, but it doesn't sag, even while it may be indulgent in another direction. Plus, are we really to feel problematically uncomfortable about a recording on account of a cadenza? I'll let you answer that one before I get on to (sink my talons into) Oistrakh and Konwitschny!

RC OK, let me get more specific. Earlier on, you quoted the leaping succession of trills in bars 332 to 339. I'd venture beyond that point, say from bar 340, where quavers somersault, ending with a wicked little quick slide (around 10'11") that for me retrospectively trivialises the whole passage. As far as brilliance is concerned, Oistrakh can't compare – his version wouldn't do for a Fiddlers' Olympics;

but a compensating sense of straining sinew bonds his performance on to my memory. 'It is a concerto for violin *against* the orchestra – and the violin wins,' said Bronisław Huberman. In other words, it's a trial of strength, and that, in my view, is how it should sound. As to Heifetz's chosen cadenzas, I don't really like either of them (Oistrakh favours the vastly preferable Joachim), but I think that of the two the Auer has more musical substance. And Koussevitzky grants Heifetz a quality that Reiner lacks: patience.

CG OK, I'll grant you those somersaulting quavers; Heifetz does rather unthinkingly saw them out at top speed, whereas Oistrakh gives us big-boned fight and victory. Beyond that, though, I'm firmly on Porter's side of the ring, because I also find Oistrakh's inflections far too mannered, especially in his very first entry. And although 'ponderous, inert orchestral playing' is mostly a bit harsh when applied to Konwitschny's first two movements, his final movement for me constitutes the equivalent of attempting to swim through a vat of treacle; in fact, I've been known to start actually waving my own arms at the speakers in an attempt to chivvy things along. Whereas, despite niggles, Heifetz and Reiner do actually serve up all three movements as I want them: tortured angst, a love letter (sure, Heifetz is aristocratic, but amorously so), and a final, cathartic joyful romp. But we haven't yet considered their more recent competition.

RC Difficult, that, because by reaching too far and wide we lose the critical

context. I have a fondness for Gidon Kremer conducted by Bernstein with a first movement that stretches to 22'05" (compared with Heifetz and Reiner at 18'54"), occasionally coarse but also flexible and expressive, a cerebral reading charged with passion. Bernstein's conducting strikes an ideal balance between Konwitschny's gravitas and Reiner's fire. Janine Jansen's version with Sir Antonio Pappano conducting has an 'open' feel to it, candid and beguiling and a joy to listen to. I could go on, but, to be honest, the best of the 'competition' in this context isn't recent.

CG Indeed, we can't reach too far and wide here – but, in the interests of establishing whether they truly deserve their classic recording status, you're right that Heifetz and Reiner have some serious non-recent competition. Milstein with Fistoulari in particular, for me; Milstein's laser-like tone is bigger and more rounded than Heifetz's, but not too much so (whereas I find Grumiaux a bit too dark-toned). Plus, unlike Heifetz, Milstein's technical polish doesn't waver for a second through what are thoroughly exhilarating outer-movement fireworks. Still, I don't think the luminaries entirely eclipse the recents. Renaud Capuçon strikes a perfect balance between romance and edge; warmth, sweetness and steel – brilliantly partnered by Daniel Harding and the Vienna Philharmonic. And, in fact, theirs is the only first movement where I physically – deliciously – flinch with the emotion of those *fortissimo* howls in bars 266 to 268. Gil Shaham is also electrifying. Yet I find myself circling back again and again to Heifetz and Reiner – for the reasons stated above, but also (and apologies, because this is going to sound pathetically woolly) because for me it just carries some indefinable, additional 'magic abroad in the air', to quote one of Heifetz's musical contemporaries.

RC Good call. For me, as a work, the Brahms is the season of mists and mellow fruitfulness, and Oistrakh captures that fruitfulness to a T. Heifetz, on the other hand, places us directly beneath the midday sun: his laser-like intensity is incomparable. But, you see, the current of my critical thinking has changed. Years ago I'd be a devoted fan of this or that artist or composer, with no compromise. Now, although I can say that Beethoven is my favourite composer, the *Jupiter* is actually my favourite symphony; and although Heifetz is my favourite violinist, when it comes to the Brahms, Oistrakh nails the mood like no one else – until someone comes along to displace him, which so far hasn't happened. **G**

Books



Mike Ashman welcomes a new translation of Wagner's Ring:

'John Deathridge's scholarly background is displayed in both the translation itself and the surrounding chronology, sources and notes'



David Threasher on a pathological study of composers' deaths:

'While many composers have been branded either syphilitics, drunkards or both, Noble often exonerates them from these calumnies'

Der Ring des Nibelungen

By Richard Wagner

Translated and edited by John Deathridge

Penguin Classics, HB, 816pp, £25

ISBN 978-0-241-30585-0



The earliest attempts at translating Wagner's *Ring* libretto into English often provided unintentional confusion and even

comedy. A year after the work's Bayreuth premiere, Alfred Forman's singing version tried to follow Wagner faithfully in both alliterative versification style, *Stabreim*, and in using only words with non-Germanic roots. Here (from the confrontation with Wotan on Brünnhilde's rock, *Die Walküre* Act 3) is one of many examples of how Forman's well-intentioned mission goes astray: 'Or strike at me now/as I strangle thy knee,/thy darling mangle,/to dust with thy maid,/from her body spill/the breath with thy spear;/but not fiercely unfence/her here to a nameless harm!'

John Deathridge, in this new translation for reading and study, has: 'Break apart the child/clutching at your knee,/crush her courage to pieces;/turn the young woman into a ruin;/erase all trace of her body/with your spear: but do not, cruel father,/expose her to such monstrous disgrace'. That's not especially consistent in style within itself but it does convey what Brünnhilde is saying in a way that's both comprehensible and faithful to Wagner. It also has pace and excitement which, along with a range of styles, are constant in Deathridge's work throughout. The Forman, however, with its blindly obedient attempt to match Wagner's *Stabreim* followed by Victorian coyness about rape ('nameless harm') reads like complete nonsense without knowledge of the German original, a criticism which held true for many of his successors (such as his near contemporary Frederick Jameson) who attempted an archaic vocabulary and a cloying over-fidelity to the original.

Deathridge is the author and editor of telling work on Wagner, from an early monograph on *Rienzi* and participation in a definitive contemporary reference catalogue of Wagner's musical works and their sources (the *Werkverzeichnis*) to a new critical edition of the full score of *Lohengrin* and the essay collection *Wagner Beyond Good and Evil*. His impeccable scholarly background is displayed in both the translation itself and the surrounding chronology, introduction, synopses, sources and notes. The German text from which he has translated has 'kept strictly to the wording and punctuation of the dialogue in the full orchestral scores of the new Schott critical edition (1980-2014) and the vocal scores based on it (2010-14)'. The stage directions are drawn from 'whichever was most detailed' in the critical editions or Wagner's collected writings.

That's helpful for potential performers, students and listeners, as is the incorporation of the many recorded comments made by Wagner himself to cast and music staff while rehearsing the 1876 Bayreuth premiere performances. A constant theme of these – try, for example, the opening Wotan/Fricka exchange in *Das Rheingold* – is the encouragement of the singers to keep the pace moving by not turning recitative passages into a succession of little arias, Wagner commenting at one point 'if you weren't such boring numbskulls *Rheingold* would be over within two hours'. We read also that he was keen to point out the subtext behind key moments in the drama, calling for Brünnhilde (in *Siegfried* Act 3) to show 'an upsetting power of expression' during the 'terrible moment' before she starts 'Ewig war ich' – thereby suggesting a perhaps unsuspected vulnerability in that lyrical outpouring.

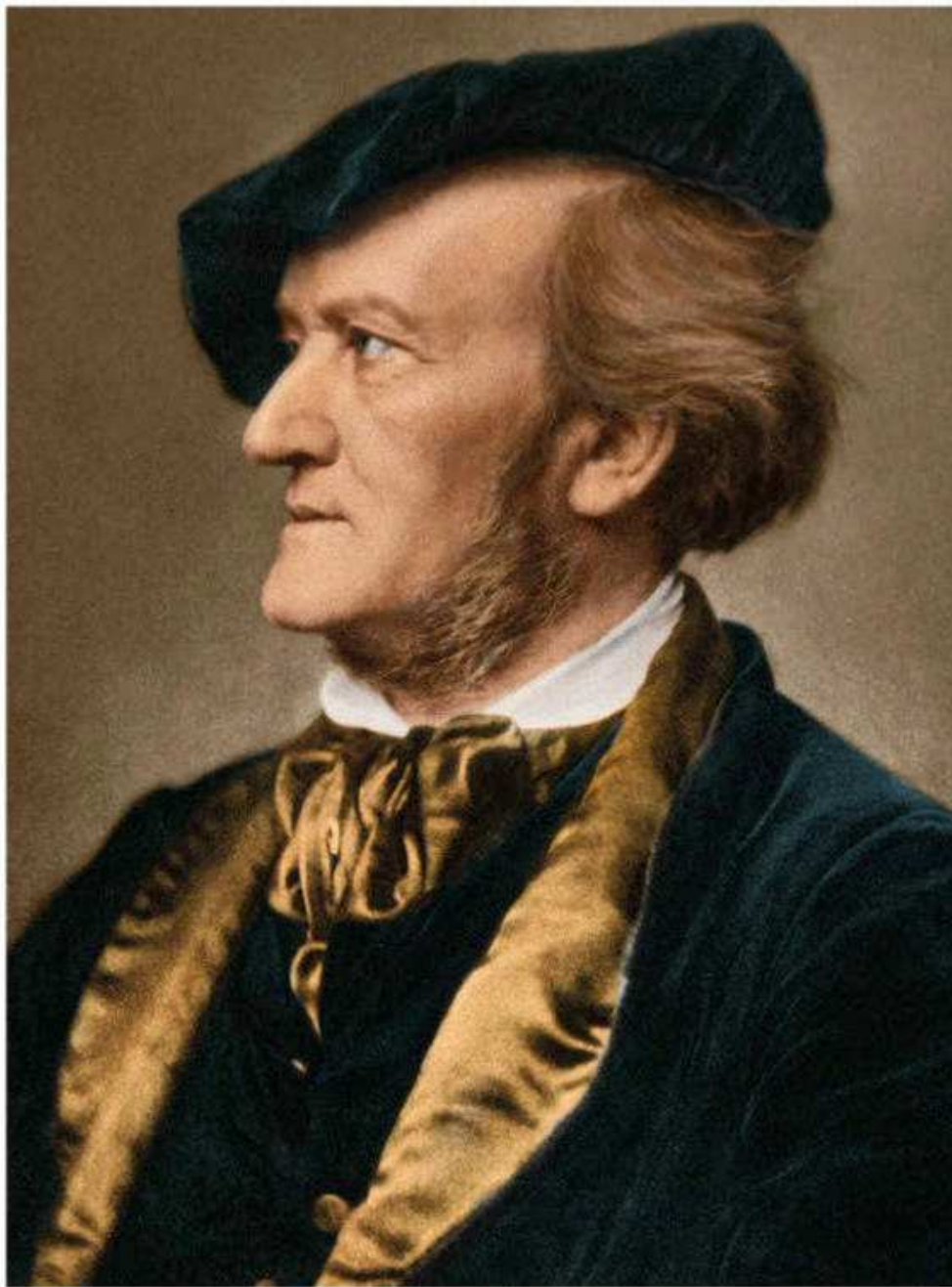
There are things Deathridge has decided not to do, some of them controversial – especially not to present his translation (German and English on facing pages) using Wagner's original poetic verse layout. (To reference this, check out the handy little Reclam German-only miniature paperbacks of each opera or

Stewart Spencer's 1993 Thames & Hudson translation, the nearest contemporary rival to this one in time and scholarship.) Nor does Deathridge attempt to find English equivalents for Wagner's use of an archaic German 'that few understood in the nineteenth century and still don't'. And he is economical with attempts to find versions of 'Wagner's alliterative language games', the infamous *Stabreim*.

If we may take his high level of researched scholarship for granted, Deathridge is less consistent as a translating wordsmith. In his attempt to match the pace and variety of the 'extraordinary richness of powerful and significant words' (Nietzsche) in the *Ring* librettos, he has not been afraid to mix centuries in terms of the expressions he uses. Not every reader will enjoy 'smell a rat', 'give me the jitters' and the Rhinedaughters 'not doing' something – in the contemporary slang sense of being utterly against something that's not 'cool' – sitting alongside more old-fashioned-sounding re-creations of poetic 19th-century emotion ('Disquiet and dread/enchain my mind', complains Wotan after Fafner kills Fasolt; 'Adorned with delicate armouries/it subdues the world', Siegmund tells his sister about the power of spring in *Die Walküre* Act 1). These differences of tone may disturb the reader, especially on first acquaintance, but they're clearly this translator's attempt to represent what he calls the text's 'language of extremes – guttural violence, over-the-top ecstasy, plus everything in between'.

It's no small achievement to bring a new translation of a work of a complexity paralleling the *Oresteia* or Goethe's *Faust* safely to port. It's also far too early to assess its relative value as literature, if easier to gauge its various supporting materials. For the present, however, this new volume should be welcomed alongside the literary translation of Stewart Spencer and the 1977 singing translation of Andrew Porter as one of the vital points of English entry into Wagner's epic text.

Mike Ashman



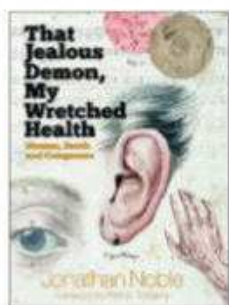
Wagner's text for *Der Ring des Nibelungen* has been translated by John Deathridge

That Jealous Demon, My Wretched Health

By Jonathan Noble

Boydell Press, HB, 526pp, £25

ISBN 978-1-78327-258-7



‘Uncertainty remains as to the degree of introspection with which composers two hundred years ago

examined their own faeces.’ Jonathan Noble has a dry turn of phrase when it comes to discussing the ills that ailed 70 great composers. This is a subject that has long fascinated music lovers and biographers, and more recently medical writers have got in on the act, interrogating what we know of the lives these composers lived and diagnosing through a combination of eye-witness testimony (whether from contemporary medics or those who met and knew the subjects) and the state of current pathological research.

Our guide is a retired orthopaedic surgeon whose clients have included test cricketers, premiership football teams and numerous

musicians and dancers. His life's work has clearly been accompanied by his love of music: it is easy to see how a diagnostician's curiosity would be exercised by a knowledge, however piecemeal, of the symptoms of the greats of the past. He divides the composers into groups based on the most likely causes of their final maladies and deaths. Thus Mozart, Bellini and Bizet lead off a chapter on composers who died young, while Haydn heads a section on those who lived to a grand old age; Noble presents

evidence to show that the romantic demise before the age of 40 was far rarer among his sample than might be believed. Then he goes into iatrogenic afflictions (illnesses and death caused by medical intervention), syphilis, alcoholism, mental illness, problems with the nervous, cardiovascular and respiratory systems, and cancer.

Another factoid he lays to rest is that syphilis was the scourge of the Romantic composer par excellence: surprisingly it is, once again, less common as a cause of death than might be casually assumed. Schubert certainly died *with* syphilis but not *of* it, concludes Noble, and Schumann had a range of conditions – exacerbated by his self-requested separation from his loved ones and the horrors of captivity – among which the French pox was at most a minimal contributor. Alcoholism, too, is deemed to be incompatible with composition; while a number of composers have been posthumously branded either syphilitics, drunkards or both, Noble is often able to exonerate them from these calumnies. Beethoven was thus tarred on both counts on the centenary of his death by Ernest Newman but Noble unearths enough biographical evidence to counter

such views. Beethoven's general temperance (not that he didn't enjoy the occasional glass or two nevertheless) and his meticulousness in washing both himself and his linen are remarked upon.

Noble goes on to suggest that Beethoven's cleanliness was due to his chronic diarrhoea – a complaint that recurs again and again among these composers. Perhaps that's not surprising; domestic hygiene and care in food preparation were naturally less well understood in earlier times. Nowadays, too, we have a greater awareness of allergies and intolerances and have the wherewithal to alter our diets accordingly. Nevertheless, the posterior problems of the likes of Rossini make for harrowing reading: a supposed fistula was revealed to be rectal cancer, whereupon the obese and frail 76-year-old composer had the tumour removed piecemeal through his anus.

There is, of course, the danger that such prying into the most intimate parts of a life, no matter how long in the distant past, may give rise to sensationalism. Noble is careful to warn himself as much as readers against falling into such a trap. In admonishing biographers for imputing syphilis to Ravel, he remarks that such an ascription is less comfortable with regards to a composer who died within living memory of some readers (1937) than to, say, Donizetti, who died a century earlier. And sensationalist tactics such as Paul Kildea's assertion that Britten's heart problems were the result of syphilis are soundly put back where they came from.

Noble's forensic application of contemporary medical knowledge is remarkable. His range of reading, too, is outstanding and always critical: even *Gramophone's* RO is chided for pronouncing on Rossini's health 'with a judgement beyond his own expertise'. The reader may wish that Noble had introduced each writer/commentator with their full name rather than just their surname at first mention. Other than that, errors are few: Bartók didn't (quite) complete his Third Piano Concerto and the work John Carol Case asked Finzi to compose in 1954 was more likely *In terra pax* than *Dies natalis*, already completed 15 years earlier. *That Jealous Demon* may be most attractive for the thorough treatments of the likes of Mozart and Tchaikovsky (neither of them poisoned), Beethoven, Mahler, Chopin and others mentioned above. Perhaps disputes over the more high-profile cases presented here – Mozart foremost among them – will never be put to rest but Noble's is a consistent, thorough and eminently readable contribution to this important strand of musical biography. **David Thresher**

THE GRAMOPHONE COLLECTION

Handel's Acis and Galatea

Laced with wit, grotesquerie and tragedy, this pastoral masque has an eclectic recorded history. **David Vickers** dives into the melting pot of interpretations and resurfaces with some aptly colourful commentary

Around August 1717, only a few weeks after the *Water Music* was performed during a royal barge party on the Thames, Handel started a series of church anthems for James Brydges (1674-1744), Earl of Carnarvon (from 1719 1st Duke of Chandos). The patron had profited as paymaster of Queen Anne's army during the War of the Spanish Succession, after which he used his fortune to purchase and redevelop Cannons, a country estate near Edgware (about 10 miles out of London). Daniel Defoe esteemed that, 'No nobleman in England [...] lives in greater splendour, or maintains a grandeur and magnificence, equal to the Duke of Chandos.'

An avid patron of the arts, Brydges spent a fortune on an impressive library, paintings by old masters and renovating the nearby parish church of St Lawrence, Little Stanmore (where Handel's 11 so-called Chandos Anthems and *Te Deum* were performed). Such fondness for books, art and architecture was common among Georgian noblemen – more unique was Brydges's recruitment of experienced professional musicians for his own private Cannons Concert. By mid-June 1718 the ensemble had grown from small beginnings to at least five singers (an odd combination of treble, three tenors and bass) and a small band of strings, including four violins (but not yet viola), two cellos and one double bass, two oboists (who also played the recorder) and a bassoonist – precisely the unusual forces for which Handel wrote the masque *Acis and Galatea*.

POTTED HISTORY OF A 'LITTLE OPERA'

Acis and Galatea was first performed at Cannons in midsummer 1718, and the only

identified participants were the tenors James Blackley (Acis) and Francis Rowe (Damon); perhaps a female soprano was drafted in to sing Galatea. The incomplete state of Handel's autograph score does not help to solve riddles about the exact circumstances of the masque's composition and first performance. However, an early manuscript copy (now in the Malmesbury collection) made for Handel's supporter Elizabeth Legh was probably copied from the lost performing score used at Cannons. This clarifies that there were five distinct characters (soprano, three tenors and bass) who combined together as the five-part chorus. Moreover, on May 27, 1718, the visitor Sir David Dalrymple reported from Cannons that the Earl 'has a Chorus of his own, the Musick is made for himself and sung by his own servants, besides which there is a little opera now a making for his diversion whereof the Musick will not be made publick. The words are to be furnished by M[ess]rs Pope & Gay, the musick to be composed by Hendell, It is as good as finished.'

The 'little opera' – whose English libretto appears to have been co-authored by John Gay, Alexander Pope and John Hughes – might have been performed outdoors after the manner of an Italian serenata such as Handel's earlier treatment of the same story *Aci, Galatea e Polifemo* (which had been created to celebrate an aristocratic wedding near Naples in July 1708). Although dissimilar in almost all respects, both works retell the transformative myth from Book XIII of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*: the sea-nymph Galatea and the shepherd Acis are blissfully in love, but the monstrous Polyphemus burns with lust for Galatea



'Landscape with Polythemus' by Nicolas Poussin (1594-1665): the painting, which dates from 1649, presents characters featured in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*

and tries to lure her away from his rival by singing a grotesque serenade; when this fails, he resorts to violence, crushing Acis to death under an enormous boulder. However, by godly intervention, Acis's gushing blood metamorphoses into a bubbling spring that becomes the source of a river – thereby the tragic lovers are united together eternally in the sea. The Cannons masque also features two shepherd confidants: the cautious Damon, who warns



PHOTOGRAPHY: PRISMA ARCHIVO/
ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

his friend Acis to be pragmatic about giving up love when faced with life-threatening danger; and the optimistic Coridon, who counsels Polyphemus that his ill-tempered bullying of Galatea is no match for softer, gentler and kinder methods of seduction (until recently, Coridon was absent from all editions, and his song was assigned nonsensically to Damon).

A concise entertainment designed to be played straight through without an interval,

Acis and Galatea is an enchanting journey through an Arcadian world of pastoral frolics and poetic lovers, albeit laced with comic, grotesque, tragic, magical and cathartic elements. Handel's own later public performances never presented the Cannons version in its original form: in June 1732 he produced the first of several bowdlerised revivals that cobbled together his disparate English and Italian treatments of the story, although this was a necessary

solution to accommodate the Italian singers in the King's Theatre opera company (this peculiar version has not yet been recorded). For his concert season at Lincoln's Inn Fields in 1739-40 Handel reverted to an all-English text – and on this occasion a choral conclusion was added to the duet 'Happy we', featuring a bell-like carillon. After his last revival in Dublin in January 1742 (without carillon), he never again performed *Acis and Galatea*. Nevertheless, in 1743 the London music publisher John Walsh printed a subscription edition of the full score – one of only two such secular vocal works by Handel given this kind of complete treatment in print during his lifetime (the other was *Alexander's Feast*). The work's popularity throughout the 18th century is evident from the number of concerts and staged entertainments organised by other musicians, and its curious afterlife led to Mozart's expanded classical orchestration undertaken at the height of his mature powers (Vienna, 1788) and the youthful Mendelssohn's exuberant rearrangement (Berlin, 1828-29).

THE RECORDINGS

This discography consists entirely of interpretations of the Cannons masque, even if its text was not presented correctly until the last decade. There are not yet any recordings of Handel's subsequent different versions, although a few small later variants have crept into some performances (the 1739 'Happy we' choral refrain makes a few appearances, usually without its carillon part; William Christie uses a soprano for Damon, as Handel did in some later revivals). The first recording, made by the London Handel Society conducted by Walter Goehr (1951), was only ever issued on LP in the USA. The earliest available one, conducted with relaxed charm by Sir **Adrian Boult**, celebrated the 1959 bicentenary of Handel's death. The overwrought choral singing of the St Anthony Singers swamps the Philomusica of London's players, but Decca's sympathetic recording captures Joan Sutherland's finest Handel singing on record, Owen Brannigan's irresistibly bluff Polyphemus and Peter Pears's sincere Acis, plus inventive (if slightly over-elaborate) harpsichord continuo playing by Thurston Dart. The cutting of almost every *da capo* repeat (and the omission of Damon's 'Consider, fond shepherd' in the 2007 Chandos issue) cruelly butchers the score.

Nearly 20 years later (in 1977), **Neville Marriner** used a better performing edition, by Jane Glover. The Academy of St Martin in the Fields's foursquare strings and oboes are heavy-handed and clumsily



Christian Curnyn's 2017 recording presents 'a treasure trove of memorable Handelian singing'

dense (especially in the 'choral' ensembles, sung by 10 singers). Robert Tear barks like an irritable sergeant major; he is the only Acis on disc who could batter Polyphemus in a street brawl. Jill Gomez's steely timbre and indistinct diction make heavy weather of Galatea. On the other hand, Philip Langridge's gracefully conversational Damon and Benjamin Luxon's roaring Polyphemus inject much-needed life into proceedings. This is the only recording of the 1739 choral conclusion to 'Happy we' that includes the carillon part – although the pleasure it affords is diminished by choppy strings and an overbearing chorus.

SCHOLARLY VERSUS UNSCHOLARLY

The debut recording of **John Eliot Gardiner's** newly formed English Baroque Soloists (1978) tapped into the fresh potential of period-instrument textures, and benefits from freer-flowing tempos, rhetorically conversant playing and the revelatory use of lightly nimble soloists – all of whom apply naturally tasteful appoggiaturas, trills and embellishments, and who combine spellbindingly in the choruses without reinforcements. Norma Burrowes's dainty Galatea produces breathtaking subtleties,

Anthony Rolfe Johnson's balance between chest and head voices is customarily gorgeous, Martyn Hill's sure-footed Damon is simultaneously at ease and virile, and Willard White is an amiably light-hearted Polyphemus (which admittedly reduces the character's dangerousness). Gardiner's sense of character, rhythm and scoring is mainly second to none (lackadaisical tiptoeing in 'Love sounds th'alarm' is a rare misstep). Moreover, he benefited from early advance access to a new critical edition by musicologist Wolfram Windzus (not published by the Hallische Händel-Ausgabe until 1991) – though the editor paid insufficient heed to the Malmesbury manuscript, and so the high tenor Paul Elliott only appears in the choruses (not as Coridon, who remains absent), and the nonsense of Damon singing Coridon's 'Would you gain the tender creature' was perpetuated.

There are copious moments of sumptuous beauty in **Robert King's** 1989 recording, but theatrical variety and dramatic characterisation are intermittent. The reverberance of London's Rosslyn Hill Chapel is a hindrance, and the King's Consort's exquisite playing in slower music

is further hampered by slushy (and unhistorical) organ continuo. John Mark Ainsley's youthfully sublime Acis is accompanied by velvety sustained oboes and strings in a gorgeous rendition of 'Love in her eyes sits playing', although the very slow pace combined with anachronistic organ cause it to sag soporifically under its lushness. Michael George plays Polyphemus as a comical panto baddie, and Rogers Covey-Crump's Purcellian high tenor and genteel ornamentation are displayed advantageously in Damon's melancholic 'Consider, fond shepherd' (with wonderful oboe playing by Paul Goodwin). Claron McFadden's piercing Galatea is a mild disappointment.

Gerard Schwarz's 1991 live recording at the Seattle Opera House mashes the choruses into an old-fashioned large-scale oratorio. The thickly noble style of the Seattle Symphony and Seattle Symphony Chorale is unthreatened by pastoral refinement, let alone a coherent sense of style – there are quite a few dubious practices, such as orchestral double basses playing in continuo-only passages, and string vibrato so wide that Moses could lead the Israelites through the middle of it. The soloists are largely unmemorable, and the claim that this presents Handel's 1739 version is not true – the 'Happy we' choral refrain does not have its carillon part. There are unscholarly solecisms from the ironically named **Scholars Baroque Ensemble**, also recorded live in 1991. The ensemble's biography claims that its artistic aim 'goes far beyond that of so-called "authenticity"', which perhaps explains why the booklet notes are loaded with bizarre inaccuracies and nonsense (even the HWV number is wrong). Damon's two songs are rewritten for a countertenor, 'Would you gain the tender creature' is cut, and the five-part vocal ensembles are sung by only four voices – with obviously imbalanced consequences. Nevertheless, the insurmountable problem is simply that the plain performance is seldom anything other than perfunctory; even the arrival and actions of Polyphemus are non-events.

ILLUSTRIOUS NEWCOMER

Early Opera Company / Curnyn

Chandos (B) ② CHSA0404

The Early Opera Company plays with amazing dexterity. Curnyn's quicksilver speeds skip



past valuable details that might otherwise have borne riper fruit, but his five accomplished singers present a treasure trove of memorable Handelian singing.

MISHMASH ENTERTAINMENT

Les Arts Florissants / Christie

Erato (B) ② 2564 65988-7

Misbalanced forces, a soprano Damon, the choral conclusion to 'Happy we' (without



its proper scoring) and several other interventionist elements do not provide a perfect text – but Les Arts Florissants' quaffable music-making is magical.

TRANSATLANTIC THEATRICALITY

BEMF Chamber Ens / O'Dette and Stubbs

CPO (B) ② CPO777 877-2

O'Dette and Stubbs's co-direction brims with delectability and astute dramatisations. Their



perceptively detailed performance conveys a vivid sense of storytelling in partnership with an excellent quintet of singers and expert Bostonian players.

There is a surer sense of storytelling and zesty theatricality from **William Christie** and Les Arts Florissants (1998), whose performance has fantasy, humour and emotion aplenty. Three additional singers in the choruses (eight singers against two violins is not an ideal balance), Patricia Petibon cast as a sparkling soprano Damon, and the choral conclusion to 'Happy we' (but without its carillon part) all confirm that Christie's artistic choices are not in harmony with Handel's original Cannons conception. Sophie Daneman's seductively whispering Galatea is convincingly nymphlike, even if a bit loose with rhythms. Paul Agnew's chesty Acis exaggerates his lower notes and the delivery of his ornamentation is laboured, but he gets the job done characterfully. Alan Ewing's darkly resonant Polyphemus sounds plausibly like a ranting giant. For the first time ever, 'Would you gain the tender creature' is correctly assigned to Coridon, though Christie tampers with the orchestration.

A liberal dose of quirkiness pervades harpsichordist **Eric Milnes**'s direction of Les Boréades (2003). Their brio yields some excellent moments – such as an extrovertly playful sinfonia, and a pleasing firmness to the pastoral drone bass note in the introduction to 'O the pleasure of the plains'. Frequent use of recorders to double other parts is needless interventionism (their implausible addition to 'Love sounds th'alarm' sounds like jolly pixies marching on Polyphemus). There are mannered manipulations of rhythms: the band suddenly pauses and then topples over during 'Shepherd, what art thou pursuing' (Marc Molomot's fragile Damon doesn't stand a chance); and 'O ruddier than the cherry' is cursed by the band seeming unable to make up its mind about where the beat is (undermining Nathaniel Watson's admirable efforts). Nothing quite prepares the listener for Mark Bleek's OTT yelping in the most amusing death of Acis ever recorded, but Suzie LeBlanc's radiant singing (and expert ornamentation) in a transfixing 'Heart, the seat of soft delight' goes some way to atoning for the severest solecisms elsewhere – and the five-voice consort singing is exemplary. The trouble with this proverbial curate's egg is that it is very good in parts.

CANNONS CORRECT AT LAST

Four years later, **Martin Haselböck** conducted the first recording to present accurately Handel's original 1718 Cannons version, with all five characters present and correct, assigned to their proper voice types, and performing the choruses without extra help. The five singers work together neatly



Boston Early Music Festival: 'vivid storytelling'

in the choruses, but they are less successful as soloists. The instrumentalists of Musica Angelica Baroque Orchestra include some of the most experienced Baroque specialists in California, but at key moments Haselböck goes for visceral excitement rather than poetry (for example, in 'Wretched lovers', a hurried dash past the chorus's description 'See what ample strides he takes!'). Bleek's second stab at recording Acis is marred by inelegant *can belto* syndrome, but there is entertaining fun from Florian Boesch's camped-up Polyphemus (guilty of some monstrous English pronunciation, but it doesn't seem to matter).

The Dunedin Consort (2008) benefits from **John Butt**'s inquisitive fresh thinking, imaginative direction from the harpsichord and unerring affinity with Handel's rhetorical expressiveness. The instrumentalists are by turn vivacious, pleasurable and eloquent. The five-voice consort is in a class of its own – nowhere more so than in the unfolding

Monteverdian-madrigal approach to 'Wretched lovers' – and they do more with the Purcellian final cadences in 'Mourn, all ye muses' than any other group of singers. Susan Hamilton's refreshingly ingenuous take on Galatea might not appeal to those seeking a creamier operatic heroine, but its lucid delicacy has an intelligent rapport with instrumental elements. All the singers are transparently in character: Nicholas Mulroy's suave Acis sounds like he actively seeks his charming fair and is enthralled by her beauty, and is genuinely affronted by the hideous Polyphemus. Thomas Hobbs sounds credibly mystified and sincerely anxious in his two songs. Nicholas Hurndall Smith's Coridon is suitably frank. In the space of a few bars, Matthew Brook's show-stealing Polyphemus is charismatic, ridiculous, comedic, pitiful, desperate to please, gleeful and yet sinister (nobody brings to life more wittily the pathos of the exclamation 'I melt', and the hilarious illustration of his 'capacious mouth'). Butt's slow speed for 'The flocks shall leave the mountains' transforms it into a rapturous duet between the lovers, oblivious to the impending jeopardy; at this speed, Brook's increasingly frustrated interruptions acquire stark menace, and the sudden acceleration of the music as he throws the rock sets up an ideal transition into Mulroy's pathos-laden performance of Acis's dying words.

THE MASQUE ON STAGE

The only performance available on DVD is the Royal Opera House's production (2009), with **Christopher Hogwood** conducting the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment. Every singing character is shadowed (or illustrated) through a miming (or dancing) alter ego of themselves, but the unremitting energy of Wayne McGregor and Laila Diallo's choreography is tiresomely distracting and neglects the

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

RECORDING DATE / ARTISTS	RECORD COMPANY (REVIEW DATE)
1959 Pears ^A , Sutherland ^G , Brannigan ^P ; Philomusica of London / Boult	Decca Eloquence ③ ④ ELQ480 4924 (3/60 ^R);
1977 Tear ^A , Gomez ^G , Luxon ^P ; ASMF / Marriner	Decca ③ ② ④ 452 973-2DF2 (9/78 ^R)
1978 Rolfe Johnson ^A , Burrowes ^G , White ^P ; EBS / Gardiner	Archiv ③ ② ④ 474 225-2ABL2 (9/78 ^R , 8/88 ^R)
1989 Ainsley ^A , McFadden ^G , George ^P ; King's Consort / King	Hyperion ③ ② CDA66361/2 (6/90)
1991 Doveton ^A , Amps ^G , van Asch ^P ; Scholars Baroque Ens	Naxos ③ 8 553188 (1/99); Dorian ③ DOR93227
1991 Gordon ^A , Kotoski ^G , Opalach ^P ; Seattle SO / Schwarz	Naxos ③ ② 8 572745/6
1998 Agnew ^A , Daneman ^G , Ewing ^P ; Les Arts Florissants / Christie	Erato ③ ② 2564 65988-7; ③ ⑥ 2564 69564-1 (9/99 ^R)
2003 Bleek ^A , LeBlanc ^G , Watson ^P ; Les Boréades / Milnes	ATMA Classique ③ ② ACD2 2302 (5/04)
2007 Bleek ^A , Perillo ^G , Boesch ^P ; Musica Angelica Baroque Orch / Haselböck	NCA ③ ② ④ 60183 (2/08)
2008 Mulroy ^A , Hamilton ^G , Brook ^P ; Dunedin Consort / Butt	Linn ③ ② CKR319 (1/09 ^R)
2009 Workman ^A , de Niese ^G , Rose ^P ; OAE / Hogwood	Opus Arte ③ ④ OA1025D; ③ ④ OABD7056D (1/11)
2013 Sheehan ^A , Wakim ^G , Williams ^P ; Boston Early Music Fest Chbr Ens / O'Dette, Stubbs	CPO ③ ② CPO777 877-2 (3/16)
2017 Clayton ^A , Crowe ^G , Davies ^P ; Early Op Company / Curnyn	Chandos ③ ② CHSA0404 (8/18)

Key: ^AAcis ^GGalatea ^PPolyphemus



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John Butt's direction from the keyboard reveals 'an unerring affinity with Handel's rhetoric'

humour and compassion of Handel's music (though there are one or two clever touches). Danielle de Niese (Galatea) and Charles Workman (Acis) make hard work of their music, but Paul Agnew's sage Damon and Matthew Rose's desperate Polyphemus come across better (though McGregor's conceptualisations of their characters are charmless). The chorus of the Royal Opera House mangling an out-of-tune 'Wretched lovers' is a low point.

It is a pity that Gilbert Blin's 2009 production for the Boston Early Music Festival was not filmed; it set the five characters among copies of fine art that had been part of Brydges's collection at Cannons. Some photographs of the Bostonian performances are included in the booklet of the audio-only recording made in partnership with Radio Bremen in 2013; **Paul O'Dette** and **Stephen Stubbs** co-direct an eminent hand-picked band of 10 expert instrumentalists, all of whom play with fantastic responsiveness, erudition and flair. Teresa Wakim's honeyed singing of Galatea's transformation scene is a moving evocation of grief and cathartic sublimity. Aaron Sheehan's dulcet Acis is an aptly naive young lover, sung with poised finesse. The contoured phrasing of Jason McStoots's translucent Damon is delightful. Douglas Williams's firmly focused Polyphemus is short on pantomime humour, instead conveying an aristocratic menace – he is more like Beaumarchais's Count Almaviva than a schizophrenic monster, and during his 'Cease to beauty to be sung' the contrapuntal violins contribute more sinewy vigour and interest than in any other recording. Zachary Wilder

transforms Coridon's 'Would you gain the tender creature?' into a wistful commentary on the ruinous course of Polyphemus's temper. Collectively, the quintet does not quite capture the madrigalian bittersweetness of 'Wretched lovers', but the charismatic description of the monster's 'ample strides' and the masque's Purcellian closing line 'Murm'ring still thy gentle love' are sung marvellously.

In a 2017 recording released this summer to celebrate the masque's tercentenary, the Early Opera Company plays deftly with extraordinary skill and dynamism. **Christian Curnyn**'s rapid speeds are usually a few notches too fast to convey an atmosphere of cultivated bucolicism, although airy cleverness of the playing makes the quick paces work better than they might otherwise have done. The breathlessly hurried sinfonia and 'O the pleasure of the plains' cavort juicily but lack playful nonchalance, and at least half of the airs are up to a minute faster than those of Butt or the Bostonians (neither of whom are slouches). Galatea is sung with breezy allure by Lucy Crowe (the mingling of sorrow and magic in 'Heart, the seat of soft delight' is beguiling – though the recorders doubled by violins might have been granted a little more space to breathe). Allan Clayton's *sotto voce* intimacy in the *da capo* repeat of 'Love in her eyes sits playing' is captivating, and an unforced Damon from Benjamin Hulett is tenderly shaded. Neal Davies's Polyphemus rages and burns extrovertly, although pathos is tightly rationed (he does not really 'melt'), and Jeremy Budd is a compassionate Coridon (although in his song it does take a few moments for everyone to settle down

into a perfect synergy). For the choruses, Rowan Pierce stepped in for an indisposed Crowe; the diction and rhythmical discipline of the quintet are flawless, although the forthright declamatory voices do not always conjure an urbane shapeliness. Curnyn's extensive experience conducting Handel in the theatre comes up trumps in the masque's closing stages, from the quiet sadness of Acis's death to the Ovidian transformation.

TO SUM UP

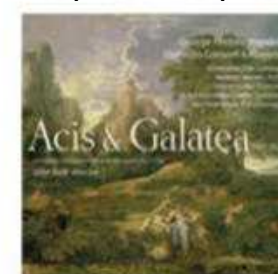
Diverse recordings of *Acis and Galatea* produced over the last 60 years constitute an abundance of riches. From Boulton to Curnyn, they indicate broader issues of how performers can approach Handel's music. There are more than half a dozen versions in my collection that I would not want to be without: Gardiner, King, Christie, Butt, O'Dette/Stubbs, Curnyn and (as a wildcard) Milnes. They do not always have much in common in terms of their musical temperaments, ideas and ingredients, but to varying extents each is a team effort that enlightens the score's manifold qualities. It is fun to imagine a hypothetical performance in which (for example) Rolfe Johnson's Acis, LeBlanc's Galatea, Brannigan's Polyphemus, Covey-Crump's Damon and Wilder's Coridon could be accompanied by Christie's violins and the Bostonians' woodwind, with strict adherence to the 1718 Cannons version, no dodgy tinkering with the orchestration and directed by conductor X – but using conductor Y's broader tempos, and employing conductor Z's continuo players. Innumerable dream-team permutations are possible. Reality is a close call between the theatrical flair and instrumental adroitness of the Boston Early Music Festival players, the exemplary singing of solo airs from the Early Opera Company, the wittiness of Les Arts Florissants and the consistently well-judged characterisations, expressivity and balanced ensemble work of the Dunedin Consort. In the event, Butt's tempos and shaping of the music always feel just right, ensuring that the masque has a satisfying emotional pull. **G**

TOP CHOICE

Dunedin Consort / Butt

Linn ⑤ ② CKR319

The instrumentalists' illuminating expressivity, a superior five-part chorus, an unparalleled



Polyphemus, Butt's judicious direction, and impeccable sound engineering are just some of the elements that amply capture the work's special charms.

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Gothenburg Konzerthus, Gothenburg & GSOPlay

Janine Jansen plays Szymanowski, October 11

Janine Jansen is joining the Gothenburg Symphony for several concerts this season as its Artist-in-Residence. This particular concert sees her join the orchestra under its Chief Conductor Santtu-Matias Rouvali for Szymanowski's Violin Concerto No 1, which is then followed after the interval by Tchaikovsky's Symphony No 6 *Pathétique*. The programme-opener, meanwhile, is an entirely different musical beast to those two lush works: Swedish composer Daniel Nelson's *Steampunk Blizzard* which, as its name suggests, is an industrial-feeling piece full of motoric rhythms. As a technology aside, those with children may be interested in the GSO's new free iOS app designed to help 9-to-12-year-olds study, called *Octomonk*. This plays selected 25-minute chunks of classical music designed to aid concentration, punctuated by five-minute breaks, with a nifty game element too. We've tried it out, and we're impressed.

gso.se

OperaVision

Cherubini's *Medea*, October 12

It's a good month for OperaVision streams

(OperaVision being the free-to-view opera streaming service drawing together productions from top houses all around Europe), and the first we're drawing your attention to is what will be the service's first ever stream from a Russian company: the Stanislavski Music and Nemirovich-Danchenko Music Theatre's critically acclaimed 2015 production of Cherubini's *Medea*. Directed by Alexander Titel, with a modernist set by Vladimir Arefyev, Felix Korobov conducts a cast headed up by Hibla Gerzmava in the title role.

operavision.eu

Main Hall, Concertgebouw, Amsterdam

Anna Fedorova & Nordwestdeutsche Philharmonie, October 14

It's an all-Tchaikovsky programme for the Sunday morning concert being live-streamed from Amsterdam's Concertgebouw this month, which runs straight through with no interval. First up is the Piano Concerto No 1, for which Yves Abel and the Nordwestdeutsche Philharmonie are joined by soloist Anna Fedorova. The concert then winds up in fairy tale mode with the *Sleeping Beauty* Suite.

concertgebouw.nl

Royal Opera House, Covent Garden & in cinemas worldwide

Mayerling, October 15

Mayerling is the highly acclaimed ballet Kenneth MacMillan created for the Royal Ballet in 1978, based on the true story of the deaths in 1889 of the emotionally unstable, death-obsessed Crown Prince Rudolf of Austria-Hungary and his teenage mistress Mary Vetsera. Most important for *Gramophone* readers, though, is that musically it's a feast: the music of Franz Liszt (appropriately for this Hungarian story), orchestrated and arranged by John Lanchbery. On the menu are the symphonic poems *Tasso: lamento e trionfo*, *Mazeppa*, *Festklänge* and *Heroide funèbre*, plus the *Mephisto Waltz* No 1, *A Faust Symphony* and several of the *Transcendental Études*.

roh.org.uk/showings

Konzerthaus Grosser Saal, Vienna & Takt1

Juan Diego Florez, October 16

Part of the Vienna Konzerthaus Great Voices series, this concert sees the tenor Juan Diego Flórez perform songs which are likely to represent unfamiliar repertoire territory even for *Gramophone* readers, because they're from his new album for Sony Classical, 'Bésame

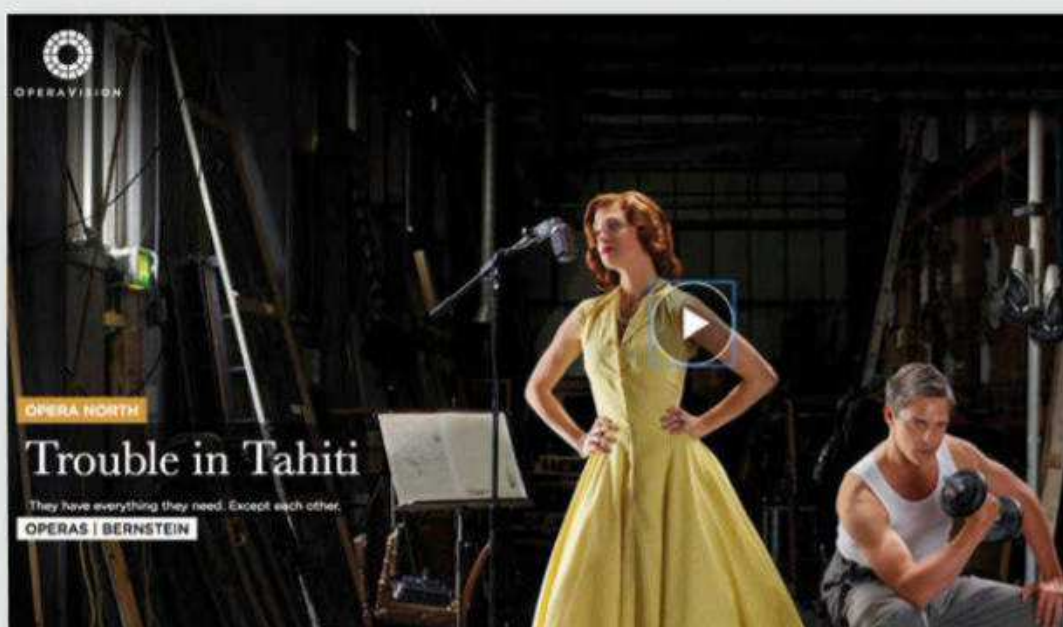
ONLINE OPERA REVIEW

Opera North makes a valuable contribution to the Leonard Bernstein centenary celebrations with his first opera

Bernstein

To start writing an opera on your honeymoon is one thing. For that opera to be about the potential break-up of a marriage is something that perhaps only Leonard Bernstein, librettist as well as composer, could do. The compact 49-minute *Trouble in Tahiti* wears its years well, art that conceals art by smuggling a Musical format into opera and a sad, sad subject into light entertainment that precedes seamlessly by numbers that resemble intentionally a 1950s radio show.

Matthew Eberhardt's production and Charles Edwards, George Leigh



and Hannah Clarke's colourful and economical 1950s-oriented designs match those tropes with a set that morphs fluently via a mobile platform from radio studio (home of the 'always smiling' Greek chorus-like vocal trio) to living room,

office or park bench. This team are already experienced practitioners of Regietheater but rightfully spare their interpretative hands to go with a medium-is-the-message simplicity.

The conductor Tobias Ringborg similarly has the music well in hand (and in 'swing') without over-obviously name checking the influences. All is consummately sung and acted by

Quirijn de Lang (Sam) and Wallis Giunta (Dinah) as the married couple failing to communicate. Sweet but heart-tugging viewing. **Mike Ashman**

Available to view, free of charge, until November 24, at operavision.eu

Mucho', celebrating composers from his native Peru, and Latin America as a whole. 'Latin American songs go straight to the heart', says Flórez, 'because they deal with the things that matter the most to us - homeland, tradition, love, heartbreak and so on - and do so with enormous charm.' Flórez is accompanied by a band, and his programme includes the album's title track by Consuelo Velázquez, Tomás Mendéz's *Cucurrucucú paloma* and Joseíto Fernández's *Guantanamera*.

konzerthaus.at, takt1.com

Orchestra Hall, Detroit & online

Fabien Gabel conducts the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, October 19

Music Director of the Quebec Symphony since 2013 (and winner of the 2004 Donatella Flick competition), and recently taking the helm of the French Youth Orchestra, the French conductor Fabien Gabel has been rapidly expanding his US presence of late, including a debut with the Cleveland Orchestra last season. This guest appearance with the Detroit sees him conduct Stravinsky's *The Firebird Suite* and *Song of the Nightingale*, plus Tchaikovsky's *Tempest* overture and Tomasi's Concerto for Trumpet, in which the solo role is filled by DSO Principal Trumpet Hunter Eberly. British readers who watch and enjoy this concert may also be interested to know that Gabel will be on UK shores later this month, on October 25, to conduct the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra in a programme of Debussy, d'Indy, and Chopin's Piano Concerto No 1 with soloist Louis Schwitzgebel.

dso.org

Metropolitan Opera, New York & cinemas worldwide

Saint-Saëns's *Samson et Dalila*, October 20

Topping the Met's October offerings is the company's first new production in 20 years of *Samson et Dalila*, by Tony Award-winning director Darko Tresnjak. Trained as being a 'vivid and seductive' staging, its title roles are sung by Elina Garanča and Roberto Alagna. Meanwhile it's a Brit - Sir Mark Elder - who gets to conduct. Also take note that, if you happen to be up for two Met screenings this month, October 27 finds Eva-Maria Westbroek and Jonas Kaufmann heading up the cast for Puccini's operatic western, *La Fanciulla del West*, conducted by Marco Armiliato.

metopera.org

Royal Academy of Music, London & streamed via Facebook Live

Alisa Weilerstein masterclass, October 23

The day before she joins the Czech Philharmonic (in residence at the Academy) and RAM students conducted by Semyon Bychkov for Dvořák's Cello Concerto in the Duke's Hall (sold out, alas), Weilerstein gives

gramophone.co.uk

ONLINE CONCERT REVIEW

Kirill Petrenko offers a glimpse of the future in three BPO specialities ...

Season opening: Kirill Petrenko conducts Beethoven and Strauss



Photo: Monika Rittershaus

24 Aug 2018
Opening of the 2018/2019 season

BERLINER PHILHARMONIKER
KIRILL PETRENKO

Richard Strauss
Don Juan, op. 20

Richard Strauss
Tod und Verklärung (Death and Transfiguration), op. 24

Ludwig van Beethoven
Symphony No. 7 in A major, op. 92

Interview
Kirill Petrenko in conversation with Emmanuel Pahud

R Strauss • Beethoven

Anyone sceptical of the hype around the Berlin Philharmonic's new Music Director could do no better than head straight for the *Don Juan* that opened the orchestra's season in August: swaggering with virility, never coarse, melting into a second subject that coaxes sublimely poised solos from Andreas Ottensamer (clarinet) and Daishin Kashimoto (violin) before the full Berlin strings take over. Their response reveals that Petrenko is already making a mark, apparently less concerned than many of his contemporaries with a culture of absolute precision than he is with nurturing a corporate commitment to edge-of-seat intensity, which he secures even more wholly in an open-air repeat of the programme the following day, before a damp audience in the courtyard of the Berlin Palace (also viewable in the DCH).

The now commonplace comparison of Petrenko with Carlos Kleiber may be wearing a little thin, but in Beethoven's

Seventh it feels unavoidable: less for peripheral similarities (a physical style as vividly communicative as it is apparently unselfconscious; an arm's length relationship with the media that has only magnified a sense of mystique) than for the satisfying tension of the triangular relationship (composer; conductor; musicians) they create. With seemingly unstoppable momentum Petrenko takes his players with him even in a pell-mell finale, which may throw up the odd harmonic surprise for the most seasoned Beethoven listener. Neither Philharmonie nor Palace performance quite works up to the storm they unleashed upon the BBC Proms audience a few days later, but the almost uncanny intuition to be appreciated here is rare enough in orchestral playing of any age let alone our own. **Peter Quantrill**

Available via various subscription packages to the Digital Concert Hall, from seven days (€9.90) to 12 months (€149), at digitalconcerthall.com

an afternoon masterclass (13.30-15.30) in the Angela Burgess Recital Hall which will be streamed live on Facebook.

ra.ac.uk

National Theatre, Prague & OperaVision

Smetana's *Libuše*, October 27

Prague's National Theatre is a particularly appropriate place for a staging of Smetana's *Libuše*, because this was the first opera it staged back at its opening in 1881; and this particular stream is a live one. Jaroslav Kyzlink conducts the Prague National Theatre Orchestra and Chorus and the Kühn Choir of Prague in a new production by Jan Burian. Cast-wise, the roles are being shared, and whilst the singers for this night weren't cast in concrete as we went to press, the likelihood is that Iveta Jiříková will be singing the title role.

operavision.eu

Croatian National Opera, Zagreb & Operavision

Ero the Joker, November 6

This autumn OperaVision is shining a light on works little known outside of their home countries, and one of these is Jakov Gotovac's comic opera, *Ero the Joker*, which since its 1935 premiere at Zabreb's Croatian National Theatre has been a major and popular part of the repertoire in all Croatian national theatres, full of the country's folk songs and dances. This live-streamed revival of Krešimir Dolenčić's colourful 1992 production comes from the Croatian National Theatre in the country's capital city, and sees Josip Šego conduct a cast with Stjepan Franetović in the title role, with the object of his romantic intentions, Đula, sung by Valentina Fijačko Kobić.

operavision.eu

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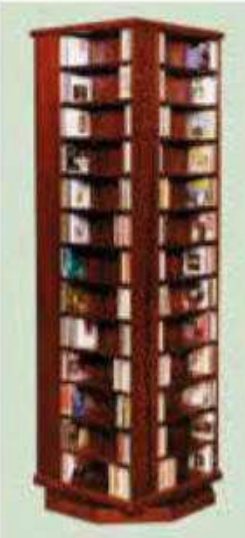
  

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THIS MONTH A CD/network player with a warm, rich sound, a DAC/headphone amp with more than you'll ever need and behind the scenes of an 'old meets new' recording session
Andrew Everard, Audio Editor

OCTOBER TEST DISCS



A winning combination of intimacy and wide-open dynamics in Caroline Goulding's 96kHz/24-bit Claves recording of Korngold and Mozart.



Combining power with subtlety, this 192kHz/24-bit recording of orchestral Sibelius from Thomas Søndergård on Linn has a chilly magic all of its own.

More on the hi-fi merry-go-round

All change for well-known brands, plus a hefty integrated amplifier and a new take on a speaker classic

These pages have, of late, been somewhat concerned with changes of ownership of well-known hi-fi brands and now comes news of a change of distribution for two of the most familiar Japanese names, Pioneer and Onkyo. The business of the European subsidiary of their Japanese parent company has been taken over by Austrian-based Aqipa, which specialises in consumer electronics distribution. The deal, which takes effect from the beginning of October, also covers the Integra, TEAC and Esoteric brands.

Another familiar brand, Novafidelity, has new UK distribution for its range of ripper/storage/streamer units – and SCV Distribution, which also handles brands including Benchmark, Bricasti, Focal headphones and Questyle, has a range of new models on the way, starting with the entry-level X14 **1**. This combines ripping (with an external CD drive), storage and streaming – of both stored music and online services – along with Bluetooth, wired and wireless networking and built-in Class D amplification. The price of this 'just add speakers' system is £649 without internal storage but, as with all Novafidelity models, it can be specified with extra-cost storage installed, with prices from £100 for a 2TB hard drive to £350 for a 1TB solid state drive, or you can install your own. The X45 is a streamer/DAC model, developed from the previous X40, and uses dual ESS Sabre DAC chips for audiophile



A9 processor and a top-of-the-range ESS Sabre DAC installation, supporting up to 768kHz PCM and DSD512 in native form.

Unchanged in its distribution is US high-end brand Krell, whose latest arrival is the new K-300i integrated amplifier **2** which can trace its lineage all the way back to the KAV-300i of 1999. Two versions will be available – all-analogue at £4698 or with a digital section for a £1000 premium – and the amplifier uses the company's iBias technology to offer the benefits of Class A working without the heat and power consumption penalties that usually brings, plus Krell Current Mode topology with fully differential working from input to output. The amp delivers 150W per channel into 8 ohms, doubling into 4 ohms. The digital version uses the ESS Sabre Pro chipset for digital-to-analogue conversion; and, as well as having optical, coaxial and USB Type A and B inputs plus Bluetooth with aptX, it has HDMI in/out connections for TV sound and a full UPnP/streaming implementation with Ethernet connectivity. Via this it will play locally stored music and streaming services including Deezer, Qobuz, Spotify, Tidal

with MQA decoding and internet radio. It's also Roon-ready.
From Falcon

Acoustics – best known for its LS3/5A monitors, still built to the original BBC design – comes the new Reference Audio Monitor range **3** in a range of real wood veneers and faux leather, and with interchangeable side panels for decor-matching. The smallest model is the Studio 10, a £1395/pr ported two-way design using a 15cm polypropylene mid/bass unit and 25mm soft dome tweeter, while the larger Studio 20 standmounter ups the woofer size to 17cm and sells for £1995/pr. The floorstanding model in the range is the £3495/pr Studio 30, which uses two 17cm bass units, a 5cm dome midrange driver and that 25mm tweeter. The prices for all three models are in European Walnut finish, with High Gloss Black or Burr Walnut available as extra-cost options.

Finally this month, a new disc ripper/server/player from Welsh manufacturer Leema **4**. Starting at £3995 for the model with 2TB of storage and available with capacities of up to 8TB, it uses a TEAC mechanism for disc-ripping and has dual Ethernet connections – one to connect to your router and the other directly to a network player. It also has a USB output for direct connection to an offboard DAC but unusually has an ESS Sabre DAC built in, allowing it to output directly into an amplifier via RCA or XLR balanced outputs. It also supports Tidal, Spotify, BBC iPlayer and internet radio. Leema has just signed a new UK-wide deal with Mian Distribution with the aim of expanding its dealer base. Which brings us back to where we started ... **G**

● REVIEW PRODUCT OF THE MONTH

Arcam CDS50

A new look to go with the changed ownership of this celebrated British brand – so how does its latest network player measure up to the competition?

Of late, it's been all change at Arcam, for many years one of the best-known names in mainstream British audio. After some time as part of a Canadian group, JAM Industries, which saw its high-end products such as the A49 amplifier being built in the USA, since last July it's been a wholly owned subsidiary of US company Harman. And Harman, of course, is part of Korean giant Samsung, which acquired the US multibrand company in an \$8bn deal in November 2016.

We've come a long way since Arcam was based in a somewhat rambling factory in Waterbeach, Cambridgeshire, with a celebrated electric milkfloat – inevitably called Ernie – used to ferry components and completed products around the site. After a brief swansong on eBay, the milkfloat went to a new home, and so did Arcam – into an office suite in a building across the road from the old factory, which premises are now used by the UK operations of Harman Luxury Brands, a stable Arcam shares with the likes of JBL, Lexicon, Mark Levinson and Revel.

For as long as I can remember there have been Arcam products. As an impoverished student I recall staring at the original A&R A60 amplifier in a hi-fi dealer's window, just as I have memories of 1986, when company founder John Dawson dragged me to the Arcam stand at a major London show – yes, we used to have those – showed me the Alpha One CD player and told me that this British-built machine was the product to see off the Japanese brands then dominating the market.

ARCAM CDS50

Type SACD/CD/network player

Price £699

Disc formats played SACD, CD, CD-R/RW

File formats played AIFF/FLAC/WAV up to 192kHz/24-bit, AAC, MP3, OGG, WMA

Digital inputs Optical/coaxial/USB Type A

Digital outputs Optical/coaxial

Analogue outputs Balanced XLR, RCA phono

Other connections Ethernet/Wi-Fi, infrared in, 12V trigger in, RS232 (control)

Accessories supplied Wi-Fi antenna, remote control

Dimensions (WxHxD) 43.3x8.7x32.3cm
arcam.co.uk



As a solid part of the British hi-fi market for over 40 years, Arcam has a significant number of firsts to its name – quite apart from selling over 30,000 units of that first amplifier. Its 1988 Black Box was the first stand-alone DAC for CD playback, while two years later it launched an audiophile tuner for the then-popular Nicam TV sound, following that in 1999 with the first high-quality DAB radio tuner, the Alpha 10.

With all that heritage behind it, it's good to see that under the new owners – and,

indeed, the new owners' owners – the Arcam brand isn't going the way of some 'acquired' British names, which end up as little more than badges on products from factories unknown. Instead, the company has a new range of products, slotting in under the higher-end FMJ line-up. Three models make up the initial offering: the CDS50 SACD/CD/network music player (£699) and two integrated amplifiers, the SA10 (also £699) and the SA20 (£999).

All three offer a subtly updated take on Arcam styling that has merely evolved

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The Arcam's smooth, mature sound demands the use of similarly accomplished partners ...

ARCAM SA20 INTEGRATED AMPLIFIERS

Arcam's new integrated amplifiers are a fine match with the CDS50 – the powerful SA20 would work very well indeed.



KEF'S Q350 SPEAKERS

KEF's Q350 speakers keep things compact while delivering a big sound from their celebrated UniQ drive unit.



over some 20 years. The differences may be in the details, with slightly softer lines and improved controls giving a more contemporary feel, but the company has managed to pull off the trick of creating a product that looks thoroughly modern without alienating its established customer-base.

We've come a long way since Arcam was based in a rambling Cambridge factory with a milkfloat to ferry components around the site

Like the £800 CDS27, launched in 2015 as part of Arcam's FMJ range, the CDS50 combines an SACD/CD player with both Ethernet and Wi-Fi streaming, allowing it to play music stored on a home computer running UPnP server software or on a suitable Network Attached Storage device. In addition, the player has both optical and coaxial digital input connections, and you can also attach a USB memory device via a rear-panel USB Type A socket and play music directly from that. Control of the streaming functions is via Arcam's own MusicLife app (for iOS only). Under the lid the CDS50 uses 32-bit digital-to-analogue conversion, enabling it to handle FLAC, WAV and AIFF file formats up to 192kHz/24-bit, as well as MP3, AAC, OGG and WMA.

This, then, is another of those 'bridge' devices, designed to smooth the transition from playing CDs to listening to computer-stored music, and in this it does rather a fine job. It may lack the extended format range of some rival devices, in which playback of files up to multi-DSD level isn't uncommon, but it also offers a selection of streaming services via the MusicLife app, including Deezer, Tidal, Qobuz and internet radio; and, of course, it is rather more affordable than some rival designs.


In recent months these pages have looked at the Marantz ND8006, for example, which offers a wider range of capabilities – but then the Marantz is a full £400 more expensive than the Arcam. Not that there's not going to be increased competition in the next few

months, with both Denon and Marantz launching network players at or around the price of the Arcam, and with DSD playback capability – but then those models won't offer the CDS50's disc playback capabilities. As the saying goes, you pay your money and take your choice.

PERFORMANCE

If the styling is a little new, albeit still recognisably Arcam, then the sound of the CDS50 – which, like the other models in its range carries the 'Designed in the UK' label but also has a small 'Made in PRC' legend on the rear panel – also conforms to expectations of the way the company's products play music. That means the presentation is smooth and rich, with no nasty shocks to offend the ear, but can be a little lazy in the treble, meaning spatial clues are ultimately slightly diminished.

All of which means that, while it may lack that edge of aggression favoured by lovers of rock or pop music, the Arcam is rather well suited to the needs of the classical listener, and indeed will please those who find some discs (or indeed files) rather hard-edged and forward. The mellow balance of the player – whether with CDs, SACDs or streamed content – covers very well its slight high-frequency softening, meaning that sound-stage pictures are compelling and realistic, with fine placement of elements within large-ensemble recordings and convincing ambience with smaller forces.

Yes, the additional information available on SACDs or higher-resolution PCM files is clearly apparent as an increase in dynamics and information, but the Arcam never has that effect of putting the hi-fi ahead of the music and always proves an extremely easy listen. The absence of sharp edges to the sound avoids the stress sometimes encountered on soprano or violin top notes, while the slight softness means the more overtly 'hi-fi' nuances are often overlooked, focusing the attention more reliably on the performance. And that, I suspect, will suit many listeners very well indeed. This is a player not only to unite physical and computer-stored media but also to please the listener over the long term, not simply to impress on a fleeting audition. 

Or you could try ...

The arrival of the Arcam CDS50 is well timed, as the market for network audio products is burgeoning, but it faces stiff competition both from above and below. There are new rivals coming from both Denon and Marantz: the latter is offering the NA6006 at £549 and the former the DNP-800AE, now on sale at £449.

Denon DNP-800AE

The Denon network player features hi-res music streaming, Apple Airplay 2 and the company's HEOS multiroom music system. Find out more at denon.co.uk.



Marantz ND8006

Marantz also offers the more comprehensively equipped ND8006 (G/18), which combines full network audio capability, HEOS and CD playback, and is designed to be 'The Complete Digital Music Source Player'. With wide-ranging format and streaming service compatibility plus superb build and sound quality, it's certainly a very attractive prospect for those migrating from discs to computer-stored music. It sells for £1099: details at marantz.co.uk.



Pioneer PD-70AE

Pioneer ups the stakes further with its £2199 PD-70AE. You'll need a computer to stream music to it via its USB input but it is a superior 'battleship' CD/SACD player with a remarkable sound. If your interest is mainly in keeping your disc collection alive, you can find more information at pioneer-audiovisual.eu.



Naim ND5 XS2

Finally, a simple-looking high-end player from Naim. The new ND5 XS2 (£2299) doesn't even have a display, being designed for operation using the Naim app on a tablet or phone. Yet it offers ultra-hi-res streaming, compatibility with a huge range of streaming services and more, and the ability to function as a Roon endpoint. It's the new entry-level model of Naim's network player line-up: find out more at naimaudio.com.



● REVIEW iFi AUDIO PRO iDSD

A DAC/amp that has all formats covered

In the computer audio age, flexibility seems to be the watchword – but here's a DAC/headphone amplifier offering more than most of us will ever need

For those involved in selling the latest generations of computer audio hardware, there's one question guaranteed to elicit a shudder: 'Yes, but has it got ...?' followed by the name of some arcane format or recently launched streaming service the designers probably never even considered. In a world where different ways of playing or streaming music keep cropping up, simply keeping up with how users access content is a recurring nightmare for those engineering audio equipment.

There are ways round it. You can take the Naim approach and rely on Chromecast to allow music services to be used, or a designer can just decide which formats to prioritise and say to buyers 'take it or leave it'. The third way is the one iFi Audio has taken with its most ambitious product to date, the Pro iDSD. At first glance this £2499 device is simply a DAC/headphone amplifier but probe a little deeper and you unearth a massive range of capabilities, way beyond the needs of even the most discerning listener.

Yes it is a DAC/headphone amp but it offers a choice of conventional and balanced outputs for both headphones and output to an amplifier. It can be used as a line-level device or as a pre-amplifier with variable output and provides a choice between solid state and valve output stages. Even that, though, is only scratching the surface. The Pro iDSD can handle file formats up to 768kHz PCM or octo-DSD 1024/49.1MHz, and will upsample all lesser formats up to 768kHz (in the case of PCM-based audio) with the choice of five digital filter settings, while DSD files can be taken up to DSD1024 if required for processing, thus increasing precision and reducing noise.

That's pretty much future-proof, by any standards, but the iFi device goes even further. As well as having a full range of digital audio inputs, including an unusual USB 3.0 Type B for computer audio, it has both Ethernet and Wi-Fi network connection. When used in conjunction with the Muzo Player app, the unit can play files at up to 192kHz/32-bit and DSD from network sources, or from microSD cards or USB storage connected directly to the Pro iDSD's inputs. In addition, it can play the likes of Spotify and Tidal over the network



iFi AUDIO PRO iDSD

Type DAC/headphone amp/pre-amp/network player

Price £2499

Inputs Combined optical/coaxial, XLR and BNC digital, USB 3.0 Type B, USB Type A, microSD card

Outputs Balanced (XLR) and single-ended (RCA) analogue out, fixed or variable level with adjustable gain; single-ended headphones on 6.3mm and 3.5mm sockets, plus balanced on 3.5mm socket, with adjustable gain; BNC digital out

Networking Wi-Fi or Ethernet

File formats played Up to 768kHz/32-bit PCM-based, up to DSD1024 (dependent on input), DXD/double DXD

Streaming UPnP, Tidal, Spotify etc, internet radio (with Muzo Player app)

Other connections External clock sync, DC power in/out

Accessories supplied Remote handset, Wi-Fi antenna, connecting cables

Dimensions (WxHxD) 22x6.3x21.3cm
ifi-audio.com

connection, has MQA decoding built in – handy with Tidal – and is Roon-Ready, so can operate as an endpoint for Roon systems.

Under the lid, which is slotted to allow cooling for those two General Electric 5670 valves in the output stage, the Pro iDSD uses a 16-core high-power processor as a USB interface and a custom-programmed upconversion system to feed the digital-to-analogue section, which comprises a 'stack' of eight Burr-Brown multibit DACs. As an alternative to the digital filtering and upsampling, the user can choose 'bit perfect' working, in which the incoming digital signal passes through to the conversion untouched, the digital inputs are galvanically isolated from the rest of the audio circuitry, so any electrical noise from source components is excluded. The two output stages – solid state and valve – are completely separate, so this isn't a case of just switching in a couple of valves

to warm things up a bit, while for all this digital capability the volume control is entirely analogue, using a balanced six-gang ALPs potentiometer, motor-driven for remote control.

PERFORMANCE

If you think all this means the Pro iDSD is fiendishly complicated, you're not too far from the truth. It takes some time to set it up for optimal performance and even more to resist the temptation to tinker with the huge range of settings available, rather than just listening. You can boost the gain of both the line/variable analogue outputs and the headphone sockets, fiddle with the digital filtering and upsampling, and, of course, switch between valve and solid state output. Even after several weeks with the iFi I was still adjusting the settings, although I'd like to think protracted use would lead to settling down a bit and just enjoying the music. Hopefully ...

Fortunately the sound of the Pro iDSD is striking however you set it up, with a superb clarity that gives excellent insight into any recording you play through it, from Tidal streams all the way up to multi-DSD. Whether you use the unit as a headphone amplifier, a source component or a digital pre-amp, it delivers class-leading detail as part of a total musical experience. There's nothing mechanical or even vaguely 'technical' here but rather a beautiful flow of music set in eye-opening sound-stage pictures, and with the 'hi-fi' stuff adding to rather than detracting from the performance.

Yes, if you find there's just too much information for you – and, coming from 'lazier'-sounding components, that can be the initial impression – you can smooth things down a bit with the valve output stage or via the use of the DAC's digital filters (at least when playing PCM-based content). I have to admit I mainly used the iFi in its 'no filter' setting and with the solid state output stage, as I found the valve one a bit too lush for my tastes. Your preference may, however, vary according to your choice of partnering equipment.

The Pro iDSD isn't for everyone, as it offers much more than most users will ever need. For exacting headphone listeners or true computer audio enthusiasts, though, it will take some beating. **G**

● ESSAY

Old meets new in an innovative recording venture

Ultra-high-resolution DSD audio and analogue tape may seem to be worlds apart but the recording sessions for a new release brought the two together

They're recording the finale of Beethoven's *Moonlight* Sonata when I arrive. Channel Classics boss Jared Sacks's hard disk DSD recording system is set up in a dressing room of Eindhoven's Muziekgebouw, with cables running through to the concert hall stage where the Ukrainian-born pianist Anna Fedorova sits at the Steinway. Outside in the corridor, two lovingly restored analogue tape machines – a Studer and a Revox – are plumbed into the mixer and painstakingly tended by the team from new company Rivavox.

From a technical standpoint, sessions don't get much more fascinating than this. I've been invited by the team at **NativeDSD.com** to attend the recording of Fedorova's first album for the label, a programme of pieces themed around 'fantasies' with works by Beethoven, Chopin, Schumann and Scriabin. She's being captured by Sacks in ultra-high-resolution DSD and simultaneously on analogue tape by Rivavox in its first co-operation with Channel.

I am a keen advocate of DSD recording: it offers the purest sound of all the various high-resolution formats on offer. I also like what Channel Classics and Native DSD are doing, with the latter's site in particular not just evangelising the format but also providing a wealth of information on how to play the recordings. Rivavox, however, was new to me. Formed by a team drawing on extensive experience with the likes of Polygram Baarn, Studer Revox and Sony, it aims not only to make its own recordings but also to supply the hardware on which to play them, restored, updated and serviced to give many years of operation. Using mainly Revox and Studer recorders, Rivavox aims to take all the fiddle out of playing and enjoying tape.

The recording today is being made live, direct to tape running at 38cm/s (15ips) in two-track stereo, with an all-analogue recording chain. The same recorders will also be used to duplicate the tapes Rivavox will sell; with buyers able to purchase recorders set up to the same standard, it should be possible to hear exactly what was captured during the recording sessions, 100 per cent in analogue and with as short a production chain as possible. The Rivavox plan is to transfer some existing



Recording at Eindhoven's Muziekgebouw: producer Jared Sacks and (right) the finished product

recordings to tape and also to make its own original recordings. This is the first outing for that process.

Over a late lunch Fedorova debates the running order for the evening's concert. She's fascinated by all aspects of the recording process but right now is concentrating on working out how to fit her programme to the demands of the tape machines – or rather the tapes, which have to be changed every 30 minutes. I ask her if this is now the easy bit. She laughs and says: 'Well, I can just play now – but then there is the small matter of the live recording for the analogue tape.'

It should be possible to hear exactly what was captured, 100 per cent in analogue and with a short production chain

The concert is to be recorded simultaneously on the Merging Technologies Pyramix Virtual Studio DSD system and the two tape machines. Sacks goes onstage to introduce Fedorova to the small audience ('We put it out on Facebook and we were swamped'), and she introduces the programme. Sacks keys the talkback and makes a last-minute 'voice of God' announcement to the hall, in English and Dutch, requesting that all mobiles be turned off. There's a pause while Fedorova settles at the piano; Sacks cues the Rivavox team, the two tape machines start rolling, and we're away. Sitting listening to the feed, I'm struck by the remarkable clarity and presence of the sound as it comes through the mixer.

Between pieces Fedorova leaves the stage to come through and grab a bottle of water. The audience is slightly confused, and she faces some good-natured 'back to your piano' and 'we're trying to record a concert here' banter from the mixing desk. Sacks notices she's playing louder live than she did in the recording sessions and tweaks the levels down a decibel or so to compensate.

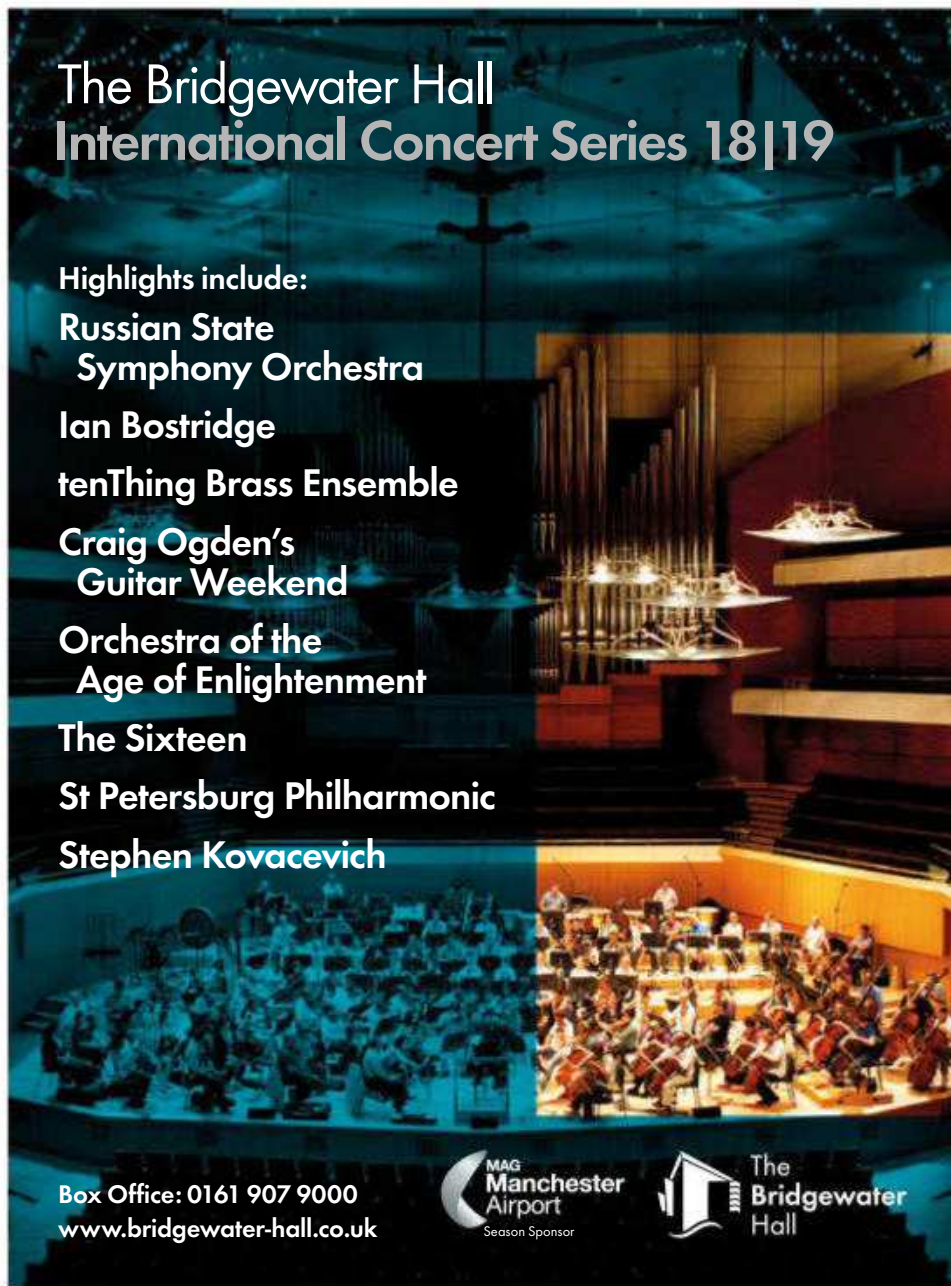
Back at the piano, she absolutely aces the last movement of the Beethoven – with which she'd been toiling just a little earlier in the day – leading Sacks to decide that he'll simply use that as the take for the finished recording.

The next morning, in the workroom/studio up a precarious spiral staircase in the former coach house of the Sacks home in rural Holland, once the residence of the village mayor, we discuss the future of such recordings. After all, Fedorova had to undergo a crowdfunding round to help cover the costs of this one. We talk about the technology used – Sacks wants to work in DSD throughout, rather than having to resort to DXD for editing, and would like to record at higher DSD resolutions. Both are in the hands of Merging and other companies developing the recording technology; and although Sacks works closely with them, I get the impression it's something of a hard push.

Then the conversation turns to the familiar subject of how to get younger listeners interested in good sound, and high-resolution recordings in general. We don't have too many answers, although I suggest that, with so many companies now making hardware capable of handling multi-DSD content, there must be some mileage in bringing the two sides of the equation together, either through sponsorship of recordings or just closer cooperation to promote the enjoyment of these 'beyond CD' releases, and it seems that it's something Sacks is keen to explore further.

We agree, however, that younger artists like Fedorova could be a key to wider acceptance, whether through outreach to listeners or other forms of promotion. Having heard her performances and the care with which Sacks captured them, I'm certain these are recordings demanding to be heard more widely. **G**

Anna Fedorova's 'Four Fantasies' is released in October on SACD by Channel Classics and as a DSD download from NativeDSD.com



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NOTES & LETTERS

Charting influences • A tribute to Melkus • Neeme Järvi celebrated

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Composers' influences

Your 'What's Next?' column has expanded my listening by suggesting compositions inspired by the great works. I have a suggestion for a new column that might offer a different perspective: 'Before Then?'. We celebrate works of genius even as we acknowledge that composers also listened to music created by others of their day and earlier generations. Beethoven, for example, idolised Handel. Are there elements from the latter's compositions that fostered inspiration in the former's? Being able to trace music backward would be as rewarding as looking forward.

*Dr Scott Culclasure
Greensboro, NC, USA*

Eduard Melkus at 90

The great Eduard Melkus celebrated his 90th birthday on September 1. In my humble opinion, he is one of the greatest violinists of the 20th century and massively underrated by many. And not just a violinist of course but a viola-player, leader and academic too.

Note in particular his choice of instruments and playing style and how he was in the vanguard of the period-instrument movement and yet followed his own path and not that of those he started out with. Why did he prefer Klotz and Amati over, say, Stainer, del Gesù and Stradivarius and why did he string them the way he did? It seems he was looking for instruments that were as unadulterated as possible. But I am sure there must have been far more to it than that.

As a student in the 1970s I bought the Corelli sonatas on LP, my introduction to him and his playing (and in fact Corelli too), and they still sound amazing today. Listen also to the *Rosary* Sonatas by Biber. Incredible. It seems he is or was Marmite for most but, for me, his sound and playing is always exciting. Like Arthur Grumiaux, I never tire of listening to his playing. Also like Grumiaux, it was always about the composer and the music and not about him, the 'celebrity' violinist. He deserves to be lauded and brought to the attention of those who do not know him, and reminded of by those who do. We need a major issue of his entire recordings. The Archiv set is an oddity, appears only to have been available from

Letter of the Month



The 2018 Gramophone Lifetime Achievement Award-winner Neeme Järvi

Neeme Järvi and the SNO at full tilt

I remember reading the comment by Robert Layton in the October 1985 *Gramophone* about 'an orchestra of the second rank playing with total zest can often be more thrilling than a luxury one coasting along on automatic pilot'. However, instead of feeling irritation on behalf of the SNO's hard working players, I recalled a performance Neeme Järvi and the SNO gave of Prokofiev's Fifth Symphony in the Usher Hall. The final movement was started with such velocity that it seemed hardly possible the players would be

able to keep up with him. But keep up with him they did as the denouement got faster and faster. After 40 years' concert going, it's still the most exciting music making I can ever recall hearing.

A few weeks later, one of the Big Five American orchestras arrived to play the same work with a top star conductor. Yes, it was just as fast, and slicker, but nowhere near as exciting as the 'second-rank' orchestra! So, maybe Mr Layton was correct.

*Robert Roy
Edinburgh*

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Korea and is very hard to acquire. It is in any event by no means complete.

Happy birthday Maestro Melkus and thank you for the music!

*Frank Ryan
via email*

Neeme Järvi's firsts

Neeme's first appointment after emigrating from Estonia in 1980 was as Principal Guest Conductor of the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra and he made his very first recording in the West

with them for Chandos – Weber's clarinet concertos with Janet Hilton.

And it was another 'first'. Chandos (as in so many things, being ahead of the game) was the first company in the UK to use the Compact Disc format. Neeme was bewildered when I handed him the disc in its jewel-case and couldn't understand how it would 'play'. That was the first of many hundred you rightly celebrate with his Lifetime Achievement Award.

*Edward Smith
CBSO Chief Executive (1978-99)*

OBITUARIES

A dramatic soprano; a Baroque specialist; a pioneering producer

INGE BORKH

Soprano

Born May 26, 1921

Died August 26, 2018



Inge Borkh (born Ingeborg Simon) fled Germany with her family in 1933, first to Austria and then to Switzerland because her father was Jewish. She studied acting at

the Max Reinhardt Seminar in Vienna, a training that stood her in good stead as she later gained the reputation for being one of the opera world's great actresses. She studied singing in Milan and Salzburg, making her debut in 1940 in Switzerland. From 1950 she sang regularly in Munich and Berlin, joining opera companies in both cities in 1952, the year she made her Bayreuth debut singing Freia and Sieglinde as well as appearing in many major European houses.

Debuts followed in Hamburg and San Francisco (where, in 1953, she sang *Elektra* in a production conducted by Solti, also making his San Francisco debut). It was there that she debuted many roles including Turandot, Lady Macbeth and Elsa. The 1950s saw many major debuts: in Weber's *Euryanthe* under Giulini (Florence: 1954), in Werner Egk's *Irische Legende* (Salzburg: 1955), Strauss's *Elektra* (also Salzburg: 1957), *Salome* (Mitropoulos at the Met: 1958, and Kempe at Covent Garden: 1959). Other roles she sang included the Dyer's Wife (*Die Frau ohne Schatten*), Klytaemnestra (Gluck's *Iphigenie in Aulis*) and Beethoven's Leonore (*Fidelio*).

One of Borkh's most celebrated recordings is of scenes from Richard Strauss's *Salome* and *Elektra* conducted by Fritz Reiner (her favourite conductor) for RCA (of her *Salome*, Alan Blyth wrote in *Gramophone*: 'she is equal to every demand of the taxing finale and evokes all the lascivious, crazed characteristics of the part, without resort to exaggerated histrionics.'). Complete opera recordings included *Elektra* (Böhm/DG), *Die Frau ohne Schatten* (Keilberth/DG), *Turandot* (Erede/Decca), *Das Rheingold* and *Die Walküre* (Keilberth/Bayreuth 1952/Myto) as well as Schoenberg's *Gurrelieder* (Kubelík/DG). She also recorded two opera aria programmes for Decca (now available on Eloquence).

Borkh retired from singing in 1973 after a run of *Elektra* performances, though she did appear again on stage as an actress.

CLAUDIO SCIMONE

Conductor and composer

Born December 23, 1934

Died September 6, 2018



The Padua-born Scimone was a major figure in the Baroque revival in Italy. After study with Franco Ferrara and Dimitri Mitropoulos, Scimone founded

I Solisti Veneti in 1959, touring and recording extensively, and often reviving the works of composers such as Vivaldi, Albinoni, Marcello and Tartini. In 1977 he made the first recording of Vivaldi's *Orlando Furioso* with Marilyn Horne and Victoria de los Angeles (Erato).

Scimone also played a role in the renaissance of Rossini's Neapolitan period, giving the first performances in modern times of *Maometto II* and *Mosè in Egitto*, as well as *Ermione* and *Zelmira*, all of which he recorded for Philips or Erato.

For almost 30 years he was the Director of the Padua Conservatory of Music.

JAMES MALLINSON

Record producer

Born 1943

Died August 24, 2018



Mallinson started his life as producer at Decca where he worked with numerous artists including Joan Sutherland, Luciano Pavarotti, Antal

Dorati (the Haydn symphonies), Sir Charles Mackerras (the Janáček opera series – four of which won *Gramophone* Awards) and Sir Georg Solti before, in 1984, going freelance. In this capacity he produced for Telarc and was involved in the creation of LSO Live, for whom he produced 65 recordings – including the *Gramophone* Award-winning set of Berlioz's *Les Troyens* conducted by Sir Colin Davis. He also worked on the Mariinsky label as well as one for the Chicago SO. At the time of his death he was part way through a Beethoven cycle with the Britten Sinfonia and Thomas Adès.

NEXT MONTH NOVEMBER 2017



Ian Bostridge and the art of song

The leading tenor reflects on singing's extraordinary power to communicate

Edward Gardner in Bergen

The British conductor talks about life leading the acclaimed Norwegian orchestra

Couperin's Leçons de ténèbres

To mark the composer's 350th anniversary year, Lindsay Kemp listens to recordings of his beautiful Holy Week meditations, and names his favourites.

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Mahler Sym No 2 (pp2011). <i>Harteros/Fink/Bavarian Rad Chor & SO/Jansons.</i> ⑆ 900167	
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Various Cpsrs Joy to the World. <i>Reiss/Bavarian Rad Chor/Munich Rad Orch/Arman.</i> ⑆ 900521	

CAPRICCIO	<i>capriccio.at</i>
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Doderer 'Music is My Life' (pp2017). <i>Önder, F & F/Auner Qt/Duo Arcord.</i> ⑆ C5342	
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CEDILLE	<i>cedillerecords.org</i>
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Holst Orch Wks, Vol 4. <i>Johnston/BBC PO/Davis, A.</i> ⑆  CHSA5192	
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





















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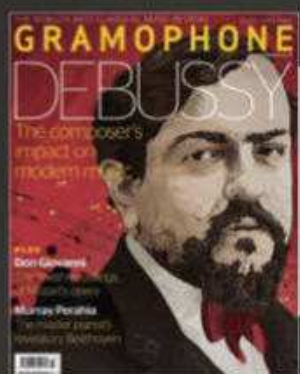
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Sarah Perry

The novelist on the power of Bach to free one's imagination and give comfort in difficult times

Music was a huge part of my childhood. As Strict Baptists, we didn't engage much in the contemporary world, but my parents invested in a CD player early on because of their love of classical music. My dad was thrilled that, when he played a CD, he could hear the string of a violin being pressed against the fingerboard, the sound of a page being turned ...

My dad is slightly deaf so he would always play music at a vast volume, on these beautiful wooden speakers that were about a metre high. I still remember coming down the stairs and hearing Rachmaninov's Piano Concerto No 2. I was so poleaxed I had to sit down on the landing – I couldn't move.

Classical music was the only music I grew up with, although some of the hymns we'd sing in chapel were old folk tunes; if I go to a classical or folk concert I feel like I'm with my own kind, whereas at pop concerts I feel like a tourist. I did Grade 7 viola and Grade 8 piano; I played the piano with the school orchestra in an arrangement of 'Vltava' from Smetana's *Má vlast*. I remember swooning over this piece, picturing Prague as this bohemian place where people would discuss poetry over cigarettes at breakfast. I also loved Mendelssohn's *Songs Without Words*, the Beethoven piano sonatas, the Chopin Nocturnes ... all that lush stuff. I had a conversation with my piano teacher and she said, 'Sarah, when you're older you'll want to play Bach – it will restore order to your life'.

And she was right. If you sit down and play a Bach two-part invention, you know it will resolve correctly. As you get older, life gets complicated, difficult, there's sadness ... and as that happens I find myself moving backwards in the canon: Bach, yes, and also early operas by Handel (especially *Xerxes*) and Purcell (I love the recordings of 'Dido's Lament' by Emma Kirkby and Christine Schäfer). And I still play the piano.

My piano is in my study, which is really important because it allows me to pause from my writing, play, and then carry on – it's all part of the same practice. If I'm struggling to write, it can feel like walking around a walled garden, trying to find my way in. So I'll stop and play something I know by heart like the Bach Prelude in C. The act of using your hands in a repetitive and meditative way while engaging your emotions somehow creates this imaginative space – afterwards, I'm often able to do another hour's work. It's also important for me to do something that, unlike writing, I'm not *supposed* to be good at. Playing the piano is self-effacing, and I'm playing someone else's music – no one cares if I faff it up.

But there was a period of time a couple of years ago when I couldn't play at all. The thing about Graves' disease is that, like any autoimmune disease, it weakens you – so when I ruptured my disc, I did it catastrophically. I was lying down a great deal, in a lot of pain, and couldn't work. But I was still



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Sequeira Costa *pf* RPO / C Seaman Claudio

When my dad first played this recording (the playing is indulgent, as it should be!) I realised how capacious our hearts are, and how big music, and art, can go.

mentally 'composting' music I'd heard earlier that year, that eventually contributed to a pivotal scene in my novel *Melmoth*.

Back in January 2016, I found myself in Prague as a writer-in-residence and, lo and behold, my flat was on the banks of the Vltava. It was also next to the opera house and I became besotted. I saw Dvořák's *Rusalka* twice, in two very different productions, and fell in love with the Song to the Moon. When I was able to work again, this is what happened: the experience of seeing *Rusalka* became inflated, strange and vivid, which enabled me to write about it in an otherworldly, gothic way. That's why the book is like it is: it's the result of travel and academic research filtered through a lens of Tramadol.

I've recently given myself a new project involving listening to the old classical warhorses. I'm re-engaging with stuff like *The Four Seasons* and Beethoven's Symphony No 7, and it's like meeting old friends. The Mozart Clarinet Concerto has been a surprising rediscovery – the extraordinary purity of the clarinet reminds me of the sound of the human voice. I have to confess that, because of my recent upheavals professionally and personally, I've been returning to what I know rather than seeking out new things to listen to. For me, classical music represents a stability and constancy that is always there. **G** Sarah Perry's third novel, *Melmoth*, is published on October 2 (hardback and ebook); visit sarahperry.net

KIRKER MUSIC FESTIVALS

FOR DISCERNING TRAVELLERS

Kirker Holidays offers an extensive range of independent and escorted music holidays. These include tours to leading festivals in Europe such as the Puccini Festival in Torre del Lago and the Verdi Festival in Parma, as well as Glyndebourne, Buxton and opera weekends in Vienna, Milan and Venice.

We also host our own exclusive music festivals on land and at featuring internationally acclaimed musicians. For those who prefer to travel independently we arrange short breaks with opera, ballet or concert tickets, to all the great classical cities in Europe.

THE KIRKER MUSIC FESTIVAL IN TENERIFE

A SEVEN NIGHT HOLIDAY | 12 JANUARY 2019

For our fourth exclusive music festival on the island of Tenerife, we will present a series of six concerts featuring the Gould Piano Trio, pianist Benjamin Frith, soprano Ilona Domnich and violist Simon Rowland-Jones.

Staying at the 5★ Hotel Botanico, surrounded by lush tropical gardens, we shall also enjoy a programme of fascinating excursions. Highlights include the Sitio Litro Orchid Garden, a cable car journey to the peak of Mount Teide and a visit to the primeval cloud forest of the Anaga Mountains. We will also visit historic and picturesque villages along the spectacular north coast, including Garachico with its 17th century convent.

Price from £2,698 per person (single supp. £375) for seven nights including flights, transfers, accommodation with breakfast, six dinners, six private concerts, all sightseeing, entrance fees and gratuities and the services of the Kirker Tour Leader.



THE CANARY ISLANDS & MADEIRA

A FOURTEEN NIGHT MUSIC CRUISE

28 FEBRUARY 2019

with Katherine Broderick soprano; the Piatti String Quartet; Matthew Hunt, clarinet and Adam Walker, principal flautist of the London Symphony Orchestra

We shall visit La Coruña, a vibrant and colourful port, before reaching the Canary Islands where we stop at Santa Cruz, with the striking concert hall designed by Calatrava on the seafront. We sail across to nearby Gran Canaria and visit Las Palmas where you will be able to see the cathedral and the Casa de Colón. In sharp contrast we then call at the unspoiled island of La Palma which has glorious and rugged scenery. In Madeira, a sub-tropical paradise for plant lovers, we will be offering an optional excursion to the renowned Blandy garden. Our final call will be Lisbon on the banks of the majestic River Tagus.



Price from £2,345 per person for an inside cabin or £4,210 per person for a Superior Suite including full-board, private drinks parties, all concerts, plus exclusive talks and interviews.

THE KIRKER SPRING MUSIC FESTIVAL AT THE HOTEL TRESANTON, ST. MAWES

A THREE NIGHT HOLIDAY | 11 MARCH 2019

Our annual visit to Olga Polizzi's fabled Hotel Tresanton in St Mawes combines a relaxing spring escape in Cornwall, with a series of world-class chamber music recitals.

Performances in 2019 will be given by the Castalian String Quartet in the Old Methodist Hall, and include works by Schumann, Haydn and Beethoven. There will also be a series of musical talks and a visit to the private garden at Lamorran, inspired by Lady Walton's garden on the island of Ischia. Dinner is included each evening at the excellent Tresanton restaurant which overlooks the sea and is lit by candles in the evening.



Price from £1,175 per person (single supp. £265) for three nights including accommodation with breakfast and dinner, three concerts each preceded by a musically illustrated talk, a visit to Lamorran Gardens and the services of the Kirker Tour Leader and a Tour Escort.

THE KIRKER MUSIC FESTIVAL IN MALLORCA

A SIX NIGHT HOLIDAY | 29 MAY 2019

The works of Frédéric Chopin are central to our Festival in Mallorca and for our seventh visit we will be joined by the Phoenix Piano Trio, Marta Fontanals-Simmons, soprano and Lorena Paz Nieto, mezzo-soprano.

Based in the village of Banyalbufar, we will discover glorious unspoiled north coast of Mallorca. There will be visits to the village of Deia, Palma and the villa of San Marroig. Our series of private concerts includes a recital in the monastery at Valldemossa where Chopin spent three months with his lover the aristocratic Baroness Dudevant, better known as the writer George Sand.



Price from £2,290 per person (single supp. £189) for six nights including flights, accommodation with breakfast, two lunches, six dinners, five concerts, all sightseeing and gratuities and the services of the Kirker Tour Leader.

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